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THE EPISTLE OF ST. PAUL TO THE COLOSSIANS

FOUR LECTURES

BY THE REV.

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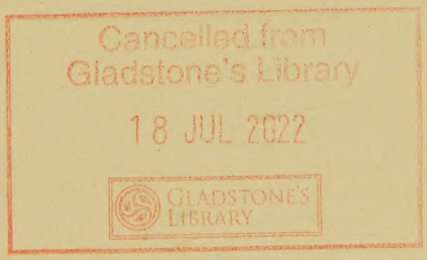

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PREFACE

THE lectures which constitute this volume were given at "The Vacation Term for Biblical Study" at Oxford in the summer of 1921, and they are published substantially as they were delivered.

They do not profess to provide more than a general outlook upon the Epistle and its more important elements, and many details have had, of necessity, to be ignored. If the volume contains anything that may prove of real value to the student, this will probably be found in the Second Lecture, where the arguments in favour of regarding "angel-worship" as the central factor in the Colossian Heresy are set out more fully than in any work on the Epistle that I am acquainted with.

The book was in print before the publication of a very suggestive paper by Dr. Rendel Harris on "St. Paul and Aristophanes" in the *Expository Times* for January, 1923. In that paper Dr. Harris sets out to prove that the use of ἐμβατεύων in *Colossians* shows that St. Paul must have been acquainted with the *Clouds* of Aristophanes and that his language in the Epistle is influenced by that knowledge, but although the article is written with all the charm and persuasiveness of the learned author the arguments are not quite as convincing as he would have us believe.

I have once again to express my gratitude to my friend and former neighbour at Peppard, the Rev. H. Shears, M.A., for his valuable help in preparing the volume for the press.

MAURICE JONES.

Lampeter, 1923.

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THE EPISTLE OF ST. PAUL TO THE COLOSSIANS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

BEFORE we enter upon our study of the contents and teaching of the *Epistle to the Colossians* there are several preliminary questions that we shall do well to dispose of.

I. THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE EPISTLE.

The first and most important of these is the question of authorship, because our interpretation of the Epistle and of its significance will be defined very largely by the view we take of the identity of its writer. It is true that whatever origin we may assign to the letter, it must always remain a vital factor in the Christian literature of the first century and an essential constituent in the history of the development of early Christian doctrine, and yet our attitude towards it must be very substantially influenced by the consideration whether it can be fitted into its right place in the body of Pauline letters, thus representing a stage of Christian teaching which was reached about the year A.D. 60, or whether we have to relegate it to the sub-apostolic period and regard it as the product of a Pauline School rather than the outcome of the Apostle's own experience and consequent thinking.

We shall, perhaps, be assisted in arriving at a verdict which shall do justice to all the facts that are involved, if we consider for a moment what is the general trend of recent scholarship in reference to the authorship

of the Pauline Epistles as a whole. We have now travelled far from those days when Baur and the Tübingen School, early in the latter half of the last century, sought to deprive the Apostle of the authorship of all the letters assigned to him by tradition save the great quartette of Epistles, the *Hauptbriefe*, viz. *Romans*, *Galatians*, and 1 and 2 *Corinthians*. With the exception of a small group of Dutch scholars, which by no means represents the best type of Dutch Biblical criticism, whose views may be studied in the articles contributed by the late Prof. Van Manen to the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, in which the whole corpus of Pauline letters is consigned to the realm of pseudepigraphic literature, all rational scholarship tends more and more to confirm the traditional position, and to see in the very great majority of the Pauline Epistles the genuine products of the Apostle's mind. There is now practically no hesitation in adding *Philippians*, *Philemon*, and 1 and 2 *Thessalonians* to Baur's list of Pauline authentic letters. The Epistle we are now discussing has not yet won universal recognition as the Apostle's very own, and considerable doubt is felt by some scholars concerning the authorship of *Ephesians*. The *Pastoral Epistles*, although opinion in favour of their authenticity seems to be gaining ground, still constitute the storm centre of Pauline literary controversy. Of four English writers who have recently dealt with the problem of the *Pastorals* three, viz. Dr. St. John Parry in his authoritative commentary on the Epistles, Dr. McNeile in his *St. Paul's Life and Letters*, and Prof. C. H. Turner in his lecture on *The Study of the New Testament* accept the Pauline authorship, and only one, Dr. Nairne, in *The Faith of the New Testament*, sounds a dissentient note.[1] We shall then find ourselves in good company and in accord with the prevailing tone of New Testament

[1] This was written before the appearance of P. N. Harrison's "The Problem of the Pastoral Epistles," a most valuable discussion of the language of the Epistles and tending to prove that they are not as a whole the work of St. Paul.

criticism if we arrive at the conclusion that the *Epistle to the Colossians* is a genuine Pauline letter.

(a) *Objections to the Pauline Authorship.*

The refusal on the part of some scholars to recognise our Epistle as the work of St. Paul is based mainly on three grounds.

(1) The first of these is *the character of the heresy* that is combated in the Epistle. This, we are told, possesses features connecting it with a stage of heretical teaching that had not been reached during St. Paul's lifetime. Baur and his followers confidently maintained that the polemic of the Epistle was directed against some form of Gnosticism which was not in existence before the second century, while some scholars defined the heresy in question more closely, and saw in the use of terms like πλήρωμα, τέλειος, γνῶσις, in the claim of the heretics to the possession of secret wisdom, and in the type of asceticism so sternly condemned in the Epistle, clear references to the system of Valentinus. Others again explained the strongly coloured Judaistic factors in the heresy by identifying it with some sort of Gnostic Ebionitism, while a third school of critics attempted to find in the Epistle an attack on the Gnosticism of Cerinthus which prevailed towards the very end of the first century. This type of criticism, which sought to relegate the Epistle to the second century on the ground that it had in view a highly developed Gnostic system, is now, however, generally discredited, and a more sober and scientific study of the Epistle and the heresy that it confutes has conclusively shown that the latter contains no features that might not well have existed as early as the year A.D. 60. The terms in the Epistle on which such stress used to be laid as pointing unquestionably to Gnosticism in a well-developed stage do not bear the technical meanings associated with them in the Gnostic systems of the second century, and more significant still is the fact that of many of the most

characteristic terms and ideas of this later Gnosticism there is no trace in the Epistle. The attempt to deprive St. Paul of the authorship of *Colossians* on the score of the character of the heresy that is so sternly reprobated in it has, therefore, ended in a signal failure and calls for no further discussion.

(2) A further objection is put forward on the plea that the *doctrine of the Epistle* is not consistent with St. Paul's teaching as set forth in those Epistles which are now universally regarded as having been written by the Apostle. It will be readily granted that there is an advance both in language and ideas in *Colossians*, as compared with St. Paul's earlier Epistles, but what we have to decide is whether it is a natural and intelligible advance, whether the progress unquestionably discernible in our Epistle is a logical development of St. Paul's earlier thinking, or, to put it in other words, could the ideas that now make their first appearance in the New Testament have originated in the Apostle's own consciousness, or must we attribute them to another person and to a later age? A close study of the Epistle shows that not only in no single instance do the new doctrinal factors that are incorporated in *Colossians* contradict any statement of doctrine formulated in the earlier Epistles, but also that in the great majority of cases they can be traced to their origins in the Apostle's thinking as previously revealed to us. What we do find here is a very substantial extension of St. Paul's realm of ideas and a marked development of concepts, the germs of which are clearly discernible in his earlier writings.

In the *Christology* of the Epistle there is, first of all, a palpable advance in the conception of *the relation of Christ to the Universe*. Christ has now become the very centre of the Universe; He is prior to and the principle and mediator of all creation, the force by means of which it is held in being, and the final goal towards which all creation tends. But every single function assigned to Christ in our Epistle can be traced to a corresponding germinal idea or counterpart in the earlier Epistles. The

great Christological passage in Col. i. 15–20 is after all only an elaboration of the thought formulated in 1 Cor. viii. 6 : " There is one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and we through Him." The only new factor in the Colossian Christology in this direction is the statement that in Christ the Universe finds its coherence and its final goal. The thought of Christ as the power which holds creation together and makes of it a united and harmonious whole is, however, only a logical extension of the statement formulated in the passage in 1 *Corinthians* we have just quoted, but the assertion that the Universe is summed up and is to reach its final purpose in Christ does seem to present a somewhat serious difficulty, in view of 1 Cor. xv. 28 where God (the Father) is declared to be " all in all " and the final goal of the world process. But it must be borne in mind that our Epistle is only concerned with the relation of *Christ* to the Universe, and that what is stated here of Him does not abolish the ultimate supremacy of the Father. It is only the penultimate stage in the world process that is postulated here, whereas in 1 Cor. xv. 28 it is the final consummation, when " God shall be all in all," that is in view.

The *doctrine of reconciliation* is also substantially extended in this Epistle. In i. 20 the scope of the reconciliation effected in the Cross of Christ is enlarged so as to embrace not only man, but the whole Universe, including even spiritual beings. Closely connected with this extension of the reconciling function of Christ is the further statement in ii. 14, 15, where it is laid down that the death on the Cross dethroned not only the Law, but also the spirit-world and the powers associated with it. The abolition of the Law through the Cross had already been declared in Gal. iii. 13, and the germ of the second idea is also to be found in the same Epistle, in iii. 19 and iv. 9, where the passing of the Law and the dethronement of the powers of the world of spirits go hand in hand. As we shall see later, the Apostle's trend of thought in this connection is very largely deter-

mined by the character of the heresy which he had to controvert, but the premisses of the doctrine of reconciliation formulated in this Epistle were already to hand in his earlier Epistles.

In the matter of *the relation of Christ to the Church* the precise terms employed in this Epistle to define this relation had been already used by St. Paul. In 1 Cor. xii. 27 and Rom. xii. 5 the Church is described as the σῶμα of Christ, and in 1 Cor. xi. 3 Christ is designated the κεφαλή "of every man," and all that is new in *Colossians* is the close combination of the two terms. In the passages quoted the two ideas are kept apart, *i. e.* where the Church is compared to a "body" it is not its relation to Christ that is in question, but the mutual relationship of its members, and again where Christ is designated the "Head" He is the "Head" in relation to humanity and not to the Church. In *Colossians*, however, the ideas are drawn closely together and are so combined as to form the basis of a splendid vision of the vital and inseparable union that exists between Christ and His Church. The materials were already forthcoming in the earlier Epistles, in *Colossians* they are fitted together to complete and crown a glorious edifice.

There would, therefore, seem to be no real ground in the *doctrinal statements of the Epistle* for suspecting its authenticity. There are palpable differences between *Colossians* and its predecessors, but they are differences which are due to a logical and intelligible development of ideas which already existed in a cruder stage in St. Paul's consciousness. The Apostle's method of argument and range of thought are, perhaps, unfamiliar, but they are very largely explained by the peculiar dangers, moral, intellectual, and spiritual, which threatened the Colossian Church and demanded special treatment.

(3) The third objection which is based upon *the linguistic character of the Epistle* is more serious than either of the two we have already considered. The difficulty

in this direction arises more from the style than from the vocabulary of the letter. As far as the strictly lexical factors are concerned *Colossians* does not differ substantially from St. Paul's earlier Epistles. It contains 33 words that are not found elsewhere in the New Testament, and 32 phrases and 28 words which occur in other New Testament documents but not in St. Paul's writings, but a study of any one of the letters universally acknowledged to be Pauline reveals a precisely similar situation. Composite words are, perhaps, more frequent here than in the earlier Epistles, and there is a marked increase both here and in *Ephesians* in the number of peculiar clauses and word combinations, while the occurrence of synonyms in pairs differentiates our Epistle from other Pauline documents. Much has been made of the absence of certain familiar Pauline terms and phrases as pointing to another hand, and the avoidance of such expressions as εἴ τις, εἰ μή, εἰ καί, which recur so frequently in the earlier Epistles, is said to furnish a serious argument against the authenticity of the Epistle. The force of this objection based on the absence of certain familiar terms from the Epistle is, however, considerably discounted when we remember that δικαιοσύνη is not found in 1 *Thessalonians* and only once in 1 *Corinthians*, that σταυρός never appears in *Romans*, that νόμος is entirely absent from 2 *Corinthians*, while πιστεύειν occurs only once in that Epistle and then only in an Old Testament quotation—words every one of which are fundamentally Pauline and might be expected to recur frequently in every Pauline Epistle. The late Prof. Mahaffy has a paragraph in *The Silver Age of the Greek World* which is very apposite in this connection. Speaking of Xenophon and his writings he remarks, "Xenophon's later tracts are full of un-Attic words, picked up from his changing surroundings, and, what is more curious, in each of them there are many words used by him only once, so that on the ground of variation of diction each single book might be, and indeed has been, rejected as non-Xenophontic. Now of classical

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writers Xenophon is perhaps (except Herodotus) the only man whose life corresponds to St. Paul's in its roving habits, which would bring him into contact with the spoken Greek of varying societies." No great weight, therefore, should be attached to the objection against the authenticity of *Colossians* which is based on the plea that it varies in diction from other Pauline Epistles, seeing that this phenomenon can be accounted for, as Prof. Mahaffy accounts for a similar factor in Xenophon's writings, as being due partly to a frequent change of surroundings and of linguistic conditions on the part of a man who was always on the move, and partly to the special character of the situation with which he was called upon to deal, which often demanded a new terminology.

The *style* of the Epistle, however, provides a more difficult problem than the vocabulary. It is not so much the anacolutha that recur so frequently, because these are common enough in the earlier Epistles, that provoke attention, as the writer's method of building up the paragraphs and sentences which constitute his medium of expression. The style from this standpoint conveys the impression of very rapid thinking leading to a slow and laboured manner of writing, a combination that is singularly unlike anything that we have become accustomed to in the Apostle's previous documents. There is a strange profusion of participles and relatives linking clauses to each other instead of the simple logical particles employed elsewhere by St. Paul for this purpose, resulting in a type of composition which is often lacking in that clearness of expression which we associate with St. Paul, and sometimes seems to land us in a state of hopeless confusion. There are passages in the Epistle where this lack of lucidity almost defeats every attempt to arrive at the writer's meaning, although it ought to be stated that the difficulty of producing a satisfactory translation of ii. 15 and ii. 18 is probably due to a corruption of the text of these two verses. In its dialectical character, therefore, *Colos-*

sians does differ materially from the Epistles that are generally accepted as St. Paul's, but, again, this is only true of the first two chapters, the remainder of the Epistle presenting no outstanding difficulties of this type. And further, all the linguistic factors which are peculiar to *Colossians* are found in *Ephesians* and in still greater mass, so that the problem of the authenticity of the former is inextricably involved in the question of its relationship to the larger Epistle, a matter with which we shall have to deal at some length.

(b) *The Relationship between Colossians and Ephesians.*

(1) *The Linguistic Factors.*—The remarkable resemblance between the two Epistles lies on the very surface. Out of 155 verses in *Ephesians* there are 54 to which corresponding parallels may be found in *Colossians*. This profusion of identical words, compounds, phrases, grammatical forms, relatival clauses that we find in both Epistles, as well as the marked similarity in the structure of paragraphs and in the length and elaboration of the sentences, point unmistakably to one of two conclusions: they must either both be the work of one and the same author, or the writer of the one must have borrowed on a large scale from the work of the other. There are many scholars who find no difficulty in accepting *Colossians* as a genuine Pauline letter, but who regard *Ephesians* as a product of the sub-apostolic period on the part of a writer who consciously based his Epistle upon *Colossians* and expanded it in his own way. Others again definitely reject both letters; while Holtzmann puts forth a very involved solution of the problem of the relationship existing between the two, and suggests that our *Epistle to the Colossians* is the outcome of the following process: (1) A short Pauline *Epistle to Colossians*, (2) A non-Pauline *Epistle to Ephesians*, (3) The canonical *Epistle to Colossians*, which is an expansion of the original Pauline *Colossians* with the help of the non-Pauline *Ephesians*—a truly

German method of solving a very simple and straightforward problem!

There is one point in the linguistic relationship of the two Epistles which tells strongly against the assumption that we are dealing with two separate writers, one of whom borrowed from the work of the other: there has been no mechanical transference of the contents of the one Epistle to the other. It is a remarkable but an easily verified fact that the innumerable words and phrases which are common to both letters are hardly ever found associated with the same train of thought in the two. The terminology of the one is frequently transferred to the other, but the terminology and thought of the one are seldom found in combination in the other. Now we have familiar examples in the Synoptic Gospels of how one early Christian writer borrows from the work of another. When St. Luke, for instance, utilises St. Mark's Gospel he merely incorporates in his own MS. masses of material as it stood in the document that lay before him; but in the case of these two Epistles the process assumes quite a different character. The author of *Ephesians* has used his model, *Colossians*, in such a way as to produce the impression of a complete identity of literary individuality, an accomplishment so perfectly astonishing that we are loth to believe that the author of *Ephesians* was not utilising an earlier composition of his own which was in his possession. To sum up, the literary relationship between the two Epistles is best explained by assuming that St. Paul was the author of both.

(2) *The Doctrine of the Epistles.*—A study of the doctrinal relationship of the two Epistles reveals to us that what is true of the literary relationship also obtains here. In the matter of doctrine, also, what is unfamiliar in *Colossians* appears again in *Ephesians*, but on a largely increased scale. This is particularly noticeable in the case of the teaching concerning the Church and its relationship to Christ. Instead of the single Church that the Apostle generally has in view in

Colossians, it is the Catholic Church in all the wealth of its claims and privileges that is placed in the forefront of the second Epistle. A mere hint in Col. ii. 19 is in *Ephesians* developed into a comprehensive picture of the Church as " the fulness of Christ " (Ephes. i. 23; iv. 12–16), and the language of the latter Epistle seems to imply that just as in *Colossians* Christ is " the image of God," so in *Ephesians* the Church is " the image of Christ." It is, therefore, more reasonable to assume here the natural and gradual growth of the mind of one and the same writer than a mere borrowing by one writer of the ideas of another. There is such a complete absence of anything approaching the slavish imitation of a copyist, and there are so many factors pointing to a great mind working out his own conceptions to their logical conclusions, that it becomes increasingly difficult to see in the Epistles the hands of two separate writers. It is also pertinent to ask why an author, who was capable of producing an Epistle so lofty in character as *Ephesians* is universally acknowledged to be, should have placed himself in dependence upon another man's work, and also why, if he was so enamoured of St. Paul's Epistles, he should have confined his indebtedness to *Colossians* when, as is quite evident, he was well acquainted with the earlier and greater Epistles? That the two Epistles proceeded from one and the same hand is to me far the simplest and most natural explanation of their mutual relationship, and as there is nothing either in the language or doctrine of *Colossians* that puts the Pauline authorship of that Epistle out of court we shall, in my opinion, do most justice to all the factors in the problem if we accept both *Colossians* and *Ephesians* as authentic Pauline letters.

(3) *The Relationship between the Epistles explained by the Apostle's Personal Situation.*—Many of the difficulties that have been felt in ascribing the two Epistles to St. Paul are removed by a careful consideration of his personal situation at that period of his life with which

we associate the writing of these letters. That he was a prisoner and that he had already spent some considerable time in prison is implied in both Epistles. Whether they were written at Cæsarea or at Rome, he was in any case enjoying a rest from missionary activity to which he had been a stranger for many years, and what was more natural than that he should spend his enforced leisure in working out the implications of his Gospel to their fullest capacity? The old Judaistic controversy which had for many years employed his mind and energy had been successfully dealt with, and now he had in the quiet of his prison-house an unexceptionable opportunity of realising that there were depths in the Divine scheme of salvation that he had not yet plumbed, and that many an idea to which he had given expression in his earlier preaching and writing required further development if he was to do justice to the Christian revelation in all its richness and comprehensiveness. His earlier Epistles show that he had already been tentatively working out in his mind a Christian philosophy of history, but it was his deep meditation in the silence of his prison upon all that was involved in Christ and His Gospel that enabled him to reach his fuller conception of the purpose of God in Christ. The fruit of this meditation is manifested in these two Epistles which reveal his insight and inspiration at their highest point. In them Christ is placed in the very centre of the Universe, supreme over all things spiritual and material, its creator, its living principle, its mediator, its reconciler, and its final goal; while the Church is conceived as the fulness of Him that filleth all things. And further, at this very time, when his mind was occupied by these far-reaching conceptions of what was involved in the Christian revelation, there came Epaphras with his news of the danger that was threatening the Church of Colossæ in the shape of a subtle and soul-destroying heresy, which set angels in the place that of right belonged to Christ and withdrew from the Son the worship that was His and offered it

to these denizens of the spirit-world. The Apostle's mind and heart were already aflame with the thought of the new treasures he had discovered in Christ, and the report from Colossæ gave him the opportunity of giving expression to the fresh ideas that had been anxiously seeking for an outlet, inasmuch as they provided the very antidote that was needed to counteract the poison that was beginning to find its way into the Colossian Church. *The Epistle to the Colossians*, written as we gather from its style somewhat in the heat of the moment, was to be conveyed to its destination by Tychicus, whose departure was delayed a while in order that he might be the bearer of another letter dealing largely with the same subject. But as this second letter was intended not for a single Church, but for a circle of Churches in the region of Colossæ, it was conceived on a wider scale than its companion and did not contain any reference to the particular heresy which occupies such a prominent place in the Colossian letter. It retained the title of *The Epistle to the Ephesians* because the Church of Ephesus was one of the Churches and perhaps the principal Church to which it was addressed.

If we bear in mind, therefore, the Apostle's situation at this particular period of his history and its natural effect upon his mental and spiritual development and consider at the same time the peculiar needs of the Colossian Church at this juncture, what is new and unfamiliar in these two Epistles as compared with St. Paul's earlier writings need cause no deep searchings of heart, and we shall find no insuperable difficulty in accepting both as genuine Pauline letters.

II. Where was the Epistle written?

If this question had been put to us ten years ago we should have answered without hesitation "At Cæsarea or Rome," but quite recently a new claimant has appeared in the field, and many scholars are now inclined to

place the writing of some, if not all, of the so-called "Epistles of the Captivity" at Ephesus. As between the rival claims of Cæsarea and Rome I have never felt drawn towards the Cæsarean theory in spite of the strong advocacy of first-rate authorities like Haupt and the late Bishop Hicks. Haupt actually goes so far as to declare that if *Colossians* and *Philippians* were both written at Rome, and if the latter came from the hands of St. Paul, which no one now denies, then *Colossians* cannot possibly be a genuine Pauline letter. This very positive statement is backed up by the assertion that these two Epistles cannot possibly have been the outcome of the same captivity, not only because they stand so widely apart both in contents and style, but also because the Apostle's situation as implied in the *Col.-Ephes.-Philemon* group differs substantially from that implied in *Philippians*. In *Colossians* and *Philemon*, both written at the same period, the tone of St. Paul's references to his bonds conveys the impression that his imprisonment is weighing heavily upon him and that he is chafing at the lack of facilities to exercise his missionary activities, whereas in *Philippians* we have indications of a remarkable buoyancy and hopefulness of spirit. This difference in tone points, according to Haupt, to two separate imprisonments, a more rigorous and close confinement at Cæsarea and a freer condition at Rome, where he was allowed to dwell in his own hired house and granted occasional opportunities of preaching the Gospel.

In answer to this argument we may reply :—

(*a*) The attempt to decide the chronology of the Pauline Epistles on the basis of the contents and style of each particular document is now frankly discouraged by the great majority of scholars. And further, even if the matter of style be of any real importance in this direction, then *Philippians* ought to find itself in the near neighbourhood of *Romans*, with which it has so much in common, and not towards the end of the first imprisonment with the solid *Col.-Ephes.-Philemon* block, so

widely different from the other two in style and character, intervening between them.

(*b*) The Apostle's experiences at Cæsarea did not, as a matter of fact, differ materially from his corresponding experiences in Rome. In Acts xxiv. 23 we read that at Cæsarea Felix gave orders that Paul the prisoner "should have indulgence; and not to forbid any of his friends to minister unto him"; and the same historian in Acts xxviii. 30, speaking of the Apostle's situation at Rome, writes, "Paul abode two years in his own hired dwelling and received all that went in unto him." It is probable that his confinement at Rome was not quite so rigorous as that at Cæsarea, but the difference in treatment was not so substantial as is claimed by Haupt and certainly not such as to justify his assertion that *Colossians* and *Philippians* must be associated with two separate captivities. The tone of the Apostle's references to his bonds in *Colossians* and *Philemon* is to be explained not by any special hardships endured by him at the time, but by the exigencies of the situation at Colossæ, where an appeal to his imprisonment was of considerable service in pressing home the lessons conveyed in the letter. At Philippi, which was threatened by no heresy and where the situation was on the whole satisfactory, no such appeal was needed, and none was made.

A positive argument in favour of the claims of Rome is found in the strongly marked Imperial colouring of *Ephesians*. The imagery of that Epistle manifests a very real influence of Imperial ideas on the mind of St. Paul. The majesty and unity of the Empire, its widely spread dominion, the unique position of the Cæsar as supreme ruler of the world and the object of actual worship, these and cognate ideas are clearly discernible behind the glorious vision of the Empire of Christ, the Church Universal, which is the central theme of the Epistle. It is not too much to say, therefore, that the Roman theory has all the advantages and few, if any, of the difficulties associated with its rival.

The claims of Ephesus are, however, considerably stronger than those of Cæsarea, and have attracted the serious attention of scholars of eminence.[1]

The suggestion that the Epistles of the Captivity, or some of them, were written in that city originated with a German scholar, Lisco, in 1900, and was supported by the following considerations :—

1. Evidence derived from the New Testament.

(*a*) There is evidence in 2 Cor. xi. 23 in the phrase " in prisons more abundantly " that previous to his incarceration at Cæsarea and Rome the Apostle had had experiences of a similar nature besides the confinement for a single night at Philippi, the only incident of the kind reported in *Acts* (xvi. 23). This supposition is also confirmed by a statement of Clement of Rome (v. 6), who speaks of St. Paul as having been " seven times in bonds."

(*b*) According to Lisco's theory the riot at Ephesus related in Acts xx. was followed by the Apostle's arrest and imprisonment, which brought him into imminent danger of death in the arena. It is this dread experience that explains the statement in 1 Cor. xv. 32, " I have fought with beasts at Ephesus," and the remarkably serious tone of the language in 2 Cor. i., and more particularly in verses 8, 9 ; " We despaired even of life," " We had the answer of death within ourselves," " God delivered us out of so great a death."

2. There is also a substantial body of evidence outside the New Testament which points to an Ephesian imprisonment.

(*a*) There still exists in Ephesus a Greek tower forming part of the line of fortifications of the ancient city, which is called " St. Paul's Prison."

(*b*) The *Acts of Paul and Thekla*, a second-century document which is generally regarded as trustworthy in its historical details, speaks of an imprisonment of St. Paul at Ephesus.

[1] See *Expositor*, Series viii., Vol. 10, pp. 289 ff.

(*c*) The "Monarchian Prologues," which are short introductions to the Pauline Epistles published in some versions of the Vulgate, and are based on a very early tradition, contain the following statement concerning *Colossians*: "Ergo jam ligatus Apostolus scribit eis ab Epheso," which implies an imprisonment at Ephesus and the composition of that Epistle in an Ephesian prison.

Which of the Epistles of the Captivity to assign to this particular imprisonment is a question upon which the scholars who are inclined to view this theory with favour do not agree. Some place the writing of all the four Epistles at Ephesus, others only the *Col.-Ephes.-Philemon* group, while a third section argues that *Philippians* was the only Epistle that originated there. A very strong case can be presented in favour of the last supposition, but the theory that the *Col.-Ephes.-Philemon* group was written at Ephesus is open to very serious objections.

(i) If this supposition is correct *Ephesians* could not possibly have been addressed to a Church in that city. And even if that letter was not intended for Ephesus itself, it must have had some Church in the region of Ephesus as its destination. How then are we to explain the impersonal and distant tone of its language, its peculiarly hesitating phraseology when the readers of the Epistle are in question as, *e. g.* in iii. 2, "If so be that ye have *heard* of the dispensation of that grace of God which was given me to you-ward"; i. 15, "I also having *heard* of the faith in the Lord Jesus which is among you"; and iv. 21, "If so be that ye *heard* Him and were taught in Him"? This type of language is intelligible enough if the letter was written from distant Rome several years after the Apostle had left Ephesus, but we should expect a much more vivid, personal, and intimate relation between St. Paul and his readers than we find here if the Epistle was written when he was actually a prisoner in the near vicinity.

(ii) A still more serious objection arises from the

references in these Epistles to St. Paul's companions at the time of writing. Among them we find St. Luke and St. Mark. Now if the use of "we" in *Acts* is a safe guide to the former's movements he was certainly not with St. Paul at Ephesus, whereas we know that he accompanied the Apostle to Rome and remained in that neighbourhood for some time. And again, we hardly expect to find St. Mark among the Apostle's valued companions quite so soon after his defection at Perga.

(iii) The question of time also presents a real difficulty. The length of St. Paul's ministry at Ephesus was little more than two years, and yet, according to this theory, the Apostle and his Gospel had been firmly established in Ephesus, the cities of the Lycus valley had been evangelised, and a subtle heresy, speculative, mystic, and complex, a syncretism of Christian, Jewish, and pagan thought which required time to develop, had become a serious menace to the newly founded communities, and all this within the space of two years and a few months!

It is one thing to acknowledge that an Ephesian imprisonment of some kind is probable, but it is quite another, in the face of the foregoing difficulties, to accept the supposition that the *Col.-Ephes.-Philemon* group came from an Ephesian prison, and, in the absence of more convincing reasons than have yet been put forward, I see no real ground for abandoning the generally accepted view that these Epistles were written during the Roman captivity and somewhat early in that period.

III. Colossæ and its Church.

Now that we have disposed of the questions of the authenticity of the Epistle and of the time and place of writing it becomes necessary to say something of the Church to which it was addressed and of the situation which caused it to be written.

Laodicea, Hierapolis, and Colossæ were three cities of note in Phrygia situated on the banks of the river Lycus, a tributary of the larger Mæander. The district is highly volcanic and subject to frequent earthquakes, one of which destroyed Laodicea and possibly the other two cities also in the reign of Nero. The soil was in ancient times remarkably fertile, and on it was reared a noted breed of sheep, so that Colossæ and Laodicea became famous for their woollen manufactures. Herodotus describes the former as being at the time of the Persian War a πόλις μεγάλη Φρυγίης (vii. 30), and Xenophon (*Anab.* i. 2, 6) adds that in his day it was a πόλις οἰκουμένη εὐδαίμων καὶ μεγάλη, but in Strabo's time it had become a πόλισμα, and had evidently declined in population and importance. Hierapolis is famous as the birthplace of Epictetus, the lame Stoic slave-philosopher, while Laodicea's pride in its wealth and prosperity is pungently commented on in Rev. iii. 17. Colossæ in Christian times was outrivalled by its neighbours, and while Laodicea and Hierapolis are frequently mentioned in early Christian records as important centres of ecclesiastical activity, Colossæ soon disappears wholly from the pages of history.

The Church of Colossæ.

It would appear that Colossæ did not owe its Christianity directly to St. Paul. There is no record in *Acts* of any visit on his part to the Lycus valley, and St. Luke's silence on the point is confirmed by the Apostle's language in this Epistle. In i. 4 he describes his knowledge of the Church's story as based on hearsay, and again in ii. 1, there seems to be a direct statement that he was personally unknown to the Colossian Christians. The Epistle is also free from any indications pointing to such intercourse and familiarity as must have arisen if the Apostle had visited Colossæ in person, while the character of his references to Epaphras in i. 7, "our beloved fellow servant and faithful minister of Christ

on our behalf," and in iv. 12, "Epaphras, one of you," seems to imply that the latter was a Colossian himself, and as the Apostle's representative in Christ had been the instrument of his fellow-citizens' conversion to Christianity. The Colossian Church, therefore, although not strictly Pauline in origin, stood in the direct line of Pauline succession, and its Christianity would be of the familiar Pauline type. The general tone of the Epistle suggests that the Church was mainly composed of Gentiles, as may be seen from such passages as i. 21, "You being in time past alienated"; ii. 13, "You being dead through your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh"; iii. 7, "in which (the works of the flesh) ye also walked aforetime when ye lived in these things." And yet there must have been a substantial Jewish admixture, because, since the days of Antiochus the Great, Jews were numerous in Phrygia, and Laodicea in particular was an important centre of the Jewish Dispersion in Asia Minor. Indications of Jewish influence in the Church of Colossæ are forthcoming in our Epistle, and more particularly in those passages which deal with the heresy in which Jewish elements, as we have already observed, played a prominent part.

That the Christians in the cities of the Lycus valley were by no means negligible in point of numbers is witnessed by the existence of "house-Churches" both in Colossæ and Laodicea; cf. Philemon 2, Col. iv. 15. The only trace of the existence of an ecclesiastical organisation at Colossæ is contained in the reference to Archippus and his ministry in iv. 17.

The Purpose of the Epistle.

During the period that intervened between A.D. 54, when the Colossian Church was probably established, and St. Paul's arrival in Rome as a prisoner in A.D. 60, Christianity in that city had made considerable progress, as we learn from i. 3–8, ii. 5. Towards the end of this

period, however, a new situation had arisen which caused considerable anxiety to Epaphras. A heresy of a particularly dangerous character was threatening the Church, the adherents of which were attempting to pervert the Colossian Christians to their own speculations. It had apparently not yet made a substantial headway among the flock of Epaphras, but the position was becoming so grave that he felt that he himself was not competent to deal with it, and that the counsel and support of St. Paul must be sought. He, therefore, proceeded to Rome where the situation was explained to the Apostle, and he in turn was so impressed by the seriousness of the position that he decided to grapple with the difficulty without delay by means of our Epistle. Epaphras himself remained behind in Rome, not altogether perhaps of his own accord (cf. Philemon 23, "Epaphras my fellow prisoner"), and the Epistle is sent to Colossæ by the hands of Tychicus, who was probably a native of that region. Tychicus, who was accompanied by Onesimus, the runaway slave who was restored to his master, Philemon, through the instrumentality of St. Paul, had in his custody not only *The Epistle to the Colossians*, but also a letter to Philemon, and, if our reading of the epistolary situation is correct, a third letter, our canonical *Epistle to the Ephesians*, which was an encyclical intended for all the Churches in that district.

IV. Analysis of the Epistle.

(a) *Introductory*, i. 1–13.

This section contains the opening salutation, the Apostle's thanksgiving for the Christian progress already made by the Colossian Church, and his prayer for its continued advance in knowledge and well-doing.

St. Paul's prayers.—The Apostle's prayers here and in other Epistles are a remarkable revelation of his very real gift of heart-stirring eloquence and of the spiritual heights to which he attained when in prayerful com-

munion with God. He seems to lose himself completely in the contemplation of the treasures of grace already bestowed upon the Colossian Church, and of the still richer treasures that await the redeemed in Christ. So overpowered is he by the vision of glory that unfolds itself before him, that in the very act of prayer he glides insensibly into an enraptured soliloquy, with the result that it is difficult to decide where the prayer ends and the passionate and inspired declamation of doctrine begins. This particular section of the Epistle reads more like a piece of brilliant inspired oratory than a literary composition, which is not surprising when we remember that the Apostle's letters were generally dictated and not written with his own hand.

(b) *Doctrinal Section*, i. 13–23.

This section furnishes an interesting and instructive illustration of the Apostle's method of argument. Although it is quite clear that he has in mind all through this doctrinal passage the heresy that lay at the root of the letter, there is no direct allusion to it, and it is only a word or phrase here and there that betrays the real trend of his thought. His procedure consists in laying a solid foundation of Christian truth as the most effective reply to the heresy and in opposing to the dreams of the false teachers the fundamental constituents of the Christian faith. In place of the crowd of spiritual powers and angelic beings postulated and worshipped by the Colossian heretics he lifts high and clear above the background of fable the One Christ Who fills all the space between God and man. Christ is the Son in a unique sense, and through Him redemption is accomplished (13–15). He is the Head of all material creation, the Universe (15–17), as He is the Head of the new moral creation, the Church (18), and is, therefore, the First in all things, because in Him dwells all the fulness of God (19). As the Incarnate Son He is essentially the Reconciler, in contrast with the shadowy phantoms with

which the heretics peopled the void between God and man, who far from being mediators themselves are actually included within the scope of the reconciliation effected in Christ (20). In virtue of this universal reconciliation, in which the Colossian Christians also share, there is bestowed upon them His forgiveness, His sanctification, and His peace (21).

(c) *Personal Section*, i. 23–ii. 7.

There is in this section, in spite of its many personal references, no trace of that element of protest against disloyalty or misjudgment of his own views that is so frequently met with in *Galatians* and 1 and 2 *Corinthians*. This is no doubt mainly due to the fact that the Colossians were not, strictly speaking, the Apostle's own children in the faith as the Galatians and Corinthians were, so that the bond existing between himself and his readers was neither so personal nor so intimate as in the other instances we have quoted. St. Paul is here more concerned with the office of an Apostle in its general aspect than with his own personal achievements in that capacity, although in one passage (i. 23) he does emphasise his own part in extending the borders of the Kingdom of Christ. There are three key-words which bring into the light of day St. Paul's conception of what the Apostleship, which he shared with others, involved, viz. suffering (24), serving (25, 29) and mystery (26). It is the privilege of an Apostle to suffer for the Church, it is his duty to serve the Church as a faithful steward, and the whole significance of an Apostle's ministry, whether by suffering or serving, lies in the unveiling of the great mystery hidden in God throughout all the ages of the past, but now revealed in and through the Church, viz. the universality of the redemption wrought in Christ (26, 27). This noble passage is followed by an expression of St. Paul's anxiety for the continued progress of the Church of Colossæ as well as that of Laodicea, but the Apostle was a firm

believer in the value of encouragement, and the section, therefore, closes upon the note of the joy he experienced at the tidings of the solidity and steadfastness of their faith which had reached him in his Roman prison (ii. 1–5).

(d) *Polemical Section*, ii. 8–23.

The last paragraph in the preceding section paves the way for what is the central purpose of the Epistle, the exposure of the essential falsity of the heresy which is so gravely threatening the soundness of the faith of the Colossian Church. It also affords a telling example of the Apostle's tact and delicacy in approaching an extremely difficult situation. Before he has uttered a syllable concerning the false teaching and its implications he has gained the goodwill of his audience by reminding them of his increased interest in them and their doings, of his fullest belief in their honesty of purpose, and of his confidence in the stability of their faith (ii. 7).

There are four outstanding points in the Apostle's mordant criticism of the heresy.

1. The essentially low standard of the false teaching, which is devoid of any moral force and never attains to any height of spiritual idealism. It is a " vain deceit " based upon " the traditions of men," and is of the earth earthy (8).

2. The ritual circumcision which the heretics value so highly has neither spiritual nor moral validity. The true circumcision is the heritage of the Christian, in virtue of his mystical union with Christ in His death and resurrection (11–15).

3. The asceticism which is essentially related to the worship of angels does not accomplish what it claims to do and provides no real protection against the evils of the flesh (16–20).

4. The whole of their " dogmatizing " is based on fundamentally wrong principles. At the root of the

heretical system as a unity lies the principle of σάρξ (21–23).

In contesting the claims put forward by the heretics St. Paul sets up two counter claims.

(1) In Christ and more particularly in His Cross the dominion over the pre-Christian world exercised by the elemental spirits, whose power was vaunted by the heretics, by whom they were set on a higher plane than Christ, has been finally broken and Christ has been constituted Lord of all (8–15).

(2) The asceticism by means of which the heretics strove to attain to union with the spirit-world is purposeless and degraded, because (*a*) it is Christ alone and not a mere observance of ritual and sumptuary regulations, that, as the Head, can mediate life to His Body, the Church, and (*b*) asceticism is only a reactionary return to the sphere of σάρξ out of which Christ has rescued us by His Cross (16–23).

(e) *Hortatory Section*, iii. 1–iv. 6.

The first four verses of chapter iii. stand between the polemical and hortatory sections, carrying over the thought of ii. 20, "If ye died with Christ," which now becomes the foundation upon which the subsequent exhortation is based. The new life of the Christian, which arises from his mystical union with the death and resurrection of Christ, is a hidden life, whose complete manifestation and fruition belong to the future, but the Christian character is even now to have Christ for its standard (cf. τὰ ἄνω ζητεῖτε, iii. 1).

This thought is then worked out in two directions. (1) Christian morality is discussed as it is to find expression in the life of every Christian. It implies the mortifying of all vices, both of mind and body, the putting away of the old unregenerate nature (iii. 10–15*a*), and the clothing of the believer with new graces, and more especially with those which tend to the edification and unity of the Church (15*b*–17). (2) The duties of par-

ticular elements in the Christian society are then emphasised, those of wives, husbands, children, slaves and their masters (iii. 18–iv. 1).

The section concludes with an exhortation to prayer, which gives the Apostle an opportunity to ask for the prayers of the Church on his own behalf, and to this he adds a warning concerning the correct attitude of the Colossian Christians towards their non-Christian environment (iv. 2–6).

(f) *Closing Section*, iv. 7–18.

The remainder of the Epistle is concerned with (*a*) the letter and its bearers and what they have to tell of the Apostle's own situation (7–9), (*b*) salutations from members of his circle at Rome (10–14) and messages to the brethren at Colossæ and Laodicea (15–17), and it closes with the Apostolic autographic confirmation and the Grace (18).

CHAPTER II

THE COLOSSIAN HERESY

I. The Character of the Heresy.

I do not propose to discuss the many theories concerning the identity and character of the Colossian heresy that have been put forward at one period or another, beyond stating that the claims of every conceivable heretical system that flourished in those days and afterwards have been advocated by the various scholars who have dealt with the subject. The Colossian false teachers have been described as Jews with theosophic or Alexandrian tendencies, pagans with Pythagorean or Oriental affinities, followers of Cerinthus, Gnostics tinged with Ebionitism, disciples of John the Baptist, and Christians of an Essene type. We shall employ ourselves more wisely in studying what the Epistle itself has to say concerning it than in examining these multifarious suggestions, and this procedure ought to enable us to arrive at a fairly adequate and satisfactory conception of the character and scope of the perversion against which St. Paul's polemic is directed.

The references to the heresy found in the Epistle are of two kinds, direct and indirect.

1. *Direct references.*—These are confined to the second chapter.

(*a*) ii. 8, "through his *philosophy* and *vain deceit* after the *tradition of men* and not after Christ."

(*b*) ii. 11, "in whom ye were also *circumcised* with a circumcision not made with hands."

(*c*) ii. 15, " having put off from Himself *the principalities and the powers.*"

(*d*) ii. 16, " Let no man, therefore, judge you *in meat or in drink or in respect of a feast day or a new moon or a sabbath day.*"

(*e*) ii. 18, " by a *voluntary humility* and *worshipping of angels,* dwelling in the things *he hath seen.*"

(*f*) ii. 20, 21, " If ye died with Christ from *the rudiments of the world,* why, as though living in the world, do ye subject yourselves to ordinances, *Handle not, nor taste, nor touch.*"

2. *Indirect references.*—The direct allusions to the heresy are supplemented by others of an indirect character which are found in the first chapter, where the Apostle unfolds his doctrine of the Person of Christ.

In his exposition of the supremacy and all-sufficiency of the Son he has constantly in mind the teaching of the heretics, and certain expressions that he makes use of in setting forth the claims of Christ serve to elucidate the nature and direction of this teaching, as, *e. g.*—

i. 13, " the kingdom of the *Son.*"

i. 14, " in whom we have *redemption.*"

i. 15, " the *image of the invisible God,* the *firstborn* of all creation."

i. 16, " in whom *all things were created,* whether *thrones* or *dominions* or *principalities* or *powers* . . . all things have been created through Him and unto Him."

i. 17, " He is *before all things* and in Him *all things consist.*"

i. 18, " He is the *head* of the body, the Church."

i. 19, " that in Him should *all the fulness dwell.*"

i. 20, " through Him *to reconcile* all things unto Himself, . . . whether things *upon the earth* or *things in the heavens.*"

i. 26, " the *mystery* which hath been hid from all ages and generations."

If we combine these two classes of references we reach the following definite conclusions concerning the content and range of the heresy.

1. It had a decidedly Jewish colouring, although its chief promoters may not have been actual Jews. This is an unavoidable deduction from ii. 11, "in whom ye were also circumcised," ii. 14, "having blotted out the bond written in ordinances," ii. 16, "Let no man judge you in meat or in drink, or in respect of a feast day or a new moon or a sabbath day," and ii. 20, "why do ye subject yourselves to ordinances, Handle not, nor taste, nor touch," which show that ceremonial legalism, including circumcision and regulations of a ritual and sumptuary character, formed an integral constituent of the system. It is clear, however, that the Judaistic element in the heresy had little in common with the Judaism that St. Paul had in view in *Romans* and *Galatians*. "Circumcision" in the Colossian scheme can have been regarded as little more than an additional privilege, and there is no trace of any attempt to impose it upon Gentiles as an essential preliminary to their admission to Christianity. The key-words of the great Epistles of the Judaistic controversy, "faith, works, righteousness," are absent, and the tone and method of St. Paul's polemic in this Epistle are markedly different from what is found in *Romans* and *Galatians*. There the opposition is treated with a certain measure of respect, and the Apostle condescends to argue with his antagonists, but here the Jewish elements in the heresy are dismissed with a contemptuous gesture. The whole system was a "vain deceit," words without substance, and the heretics were busying themselves about mere shadows. Cf. ii. 8, 17.

2. There are in the heresy certain definite factors which stand outside normal Judaism, such as—

(a) *Asceticism.* Cf. ii. 21–23.

(b) *The assumption of a superior standard of wisdom* on the part of the devotees. Cf. ii. 4, "persuasiveness of speech"; 23, "a show of wisdom," and the use of the term "mystery" in i. 26, 27, ii. 2, 3, where the Apostle seems to be hinting at an esoteric teaching and the claim to the possession of a higher wisdom on the

part of a select coterie of heretics, a claim apparently based on visions. Cf. ii. 18, "standing upon what they have seen." (See special note.)

(c) *The cult of angels*, which provides the key to the character of the heresy as a whole. To this there is explicit reference in ii. 18, "worshipping of angels." In this verse all the three significant factors noted above, *asceticism*, *visions*, and *the angel-cult* are brought together, showing that in the heretical system they are closely related to each other. Asceticism provides the stimulus to the visions, and these enable the mystic to attain to union with the world of spirits, which eventually bestows upon him the higher and exclusive wisdom—the much vaunted philosophy to which the Apostle alludes in terms of withering sarcasm.

Speaking generally, what the Epistle reveals is a species of teaching with semi-Gnostic tendencies, containing a spurious philosophy based on arbitrary ἐντάλματα and a doctrine erroneous in its fundamental principles. Syncretism, eclecticism, and esotericism have a share in its origin, and theosophy plays a considerable part in its actual expression. It is a blend of elements which were endemic in the popular religion of Phrygia, where orgiastic Attis worship, the cult of Cybele, ecstasy, and magic rites had already found a home; and combined with these were certain notions and practices current in Jewish circles which had become sensitive to pagan influences. Conspicuous examples of this contamination among Jews of the Dispersion are furnished by the stories of Simon Magus, Elymas the sorcerer, and the exorcists of Ephesus found in *Acts*. The Montanism of later days with its prophets, prophetesses, and the "enthusiasm" which was its most characteristic feature was a product of the same Phrygian environment.

A close study of the allusions to the heresy in the Epistle, and more particularly of those passages in which the expression "principalities and powers" recurs with pointed emphasis, suggests that its centre and core consisted in the "worship of angels," and that the other

factors that have been enumerated were only subsidiary and contributory to the main interest. It will be necessary, therefore, to deal at some length with the views of the ancient world concerning the realm of spirits, and with St. Paul's own belief in this connection.

II. The Dualism of St. Paul.

It is possible that the most fundamental difference between the ancient world and the Western world of our own day lies in the belief which possessed the ancient world that man was under the dominion of an evil power or hosts of evil powers, who exercised a malignant and irresistible influence upon his life, a belief which darkened and saddened the whole of human existence. To that world these evil spirits were more real than the men and women that were met in actual life. The philosophers even were not immune from this perversion, and it was to the demons that they attributed the origin of evil, all the mystery and trouble of the world, and the impassable gulf that they interposed between God and man. The Eastern modern world has not by any means been freed from this incubus, and in India and elsewhere there are countless millions for whom the Universe is filled with demoniacal beings who operate with immediate and crushing effect upon their daily life. A careful study of St. Paul's writings shows that he also recognised the existence of powers other than God and external to man, exercising influence upon human affairs and in some sense or degree independent of God, and that in this respect he shared the opinions which were practically universal in his world and age. It is a mistake, however, to charge the Apostle with being a thorough-going dualist of the Hellenistic type, as is the custom of some advanced critics, who assert that he taught dualism both in its metaphysical and cosmic aspects.

There is no real foundation for the statement that he held the view that matter was essentially evil, and that

in a sense the world was not God's world, but a world entirely abandoned to the power of evil. He does teach an ethical dualism of flesh and spirit as the outcome of his own spiritual experience, but nowhere does he hold that flesh and spirit are radically antagonistic, and, in spite of expressions which seem to point in the opposite direction, the world is still for him fundamentally God's world. But there is unquestionably a dualistic element in his thought and teaching, if by dualism we mean a recognition of evil spiritual powers exercising sway over the life of man and hostile to God and His purposes.

1. *The Doctrine of the Two Ages.*

We shall first of all direct attention to his belief in the doctrine of the two ages, which finds frequent expression in his Epistles.

St. Paul, in common with other minds of his day, divided the course of the world's history into two periods, or, to use New Testament language, into two "æons" or ages, viz. "the present evil world" of Gal. i. 4, and "the world to come" of Ephes. i. 21. This doctrine of the two ages makes its first appearance in Jewish literature in the later stages of Old Testament history. In *The Book of Daniel, e. g.*, we meet with two great periods, the period of the world-kingdoms (the vision of the Beasts) and the period of the kingdom of the Saints (Dan. vii.), where the judgment and destruction of the former is immediately followed by the establishment of the reign of the Saints. This idea was considerably developed in the later Apocalyptic Books, but with a significant modification.

The first age is no longer regarded as subject to earthly tyrants, as in the vision of Daniel, but is in bondage to spiritual powers of evil. In *Enoch, The Book of Jubilees, 4 Ezra, The Assumption of Moses,* a definite span of years, ranging from 5,000 to 10,000, according as its origin is made to coincide with the fall of man or with the fall of the angels, is assigned to the present age.

Later Messianic doctrine was also materially influenced by this prevailing mood, which was mainly the outcome of a pronounced pessimistic outlook upon the world. The loftiest minds among the later Jews still believed intensely in God and His Providence, which led them to see in a world in which God's people were subjected to ceaseless oppression and persecution, not the hand of God, but the dominion of evil powers, hostile both to God and man. And, further, their invincible faith in the ultimate goodness of God would not allow them to view this calamitous fate as permanent, and so there arose in their hearts the hope of a new age, the reign of God, in which the dominating figure would be that of the Messiah, who as God's representative would give battle to the spiritual hosts of wickedness and utterly overthrow them. In 1 *Enoch* the thought of the coming destruction of the spirits of evil is prominent, and among the powers to be abolished are the angels who had had intercourse with the daughters of men, and so had brought misery into the world. In *The Book of Jubilees*, and *The Testaments of the XII Patriarchs*, " the prince of this world " who, as Satan, enters into conflict with God is a familiar figure.

The doctrine of a Transcendent God, far removed from the world of men, which was the outcome of the Jew's pessimistic mood, was also largely responsible for the growth of a system of angelology which became a prominent element in Jewish religious thought at this time. Seeing that God dwelt in heaven, distant and inaccessible, there was brought into being an elaborate scheme of mediation between the finite and the Infinite, and the space that separated God from man was filled by hosts of angelic mediators of various designations and ranks. This tendency towards angelological speculation was also encouraged by the contact of the Jews with the Persian religion in post-exilic days, in which religion angels, or spirits corresponding to angels, were a conspicuous element, and it is in this direction that we are probably to look for the origin of the angelic hierarchy,

with its gradation of ranks, which is such a marked feature, *e. g.* in *The Books of Enoch* and *The Testaments of the XII Patriarchs*.

This doctrine of the two ages and the angelology associated with it are taken over bodily by St. Paul, but his thoughts in this connection are naturally coloured and modified by his Christian belief. It is his conception of what Christ has achieved that explains why in his doctrine of the two ages he vacillates between two ideas. He assumes that, in one sense, the new age has already arrived and that they who are in Christ have been translated out of the world of darkness into the Kingdom of light. Christians are *now*, in virtue of their union with Christ, "children of light," and the dominion of the evil powers has been definitely abolished. At other times he pictures the new age as still in the future, when Christ shall appear in glory, having dethroned all rule and all authority and power. This seems to be the view he takes, *e. g.* in Rom. viii. 18, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to usward," and other cognate passages, in which the present world in its general aspect is still regarded as being in subjection to evil powers hostile to God and man. From this standpoint he conceives the deliverance as delayed until the coming of the End, the consummation of all things, when the final victory of Christ over every power and force arrayed against Him shall be the prelude to the absolute reign of God. It is, however, the former of these two ideas that is most characteristic of St. Paul and is met with most frequently in his Epistles. That he generally conceived the new age as having already materialised and the redeemed in Christ as having been now translated into it, is clear from such passages as Rom. xii. 2; 1 Cor. ii. 6, 8; x. 11; 2 Cor. iv. 4; Ephes. ii. 7, in most of which the significant phrase ὁ αἰὼν οὗτος occurs. He occasionally uses the synonym κόσμος instead of αἰών in this sense, as in 1 Cor. i. 27; iii. 19; v. 10; and in Ephes. ii. 2, both terms are employed to

express his view of the two ages. The phrase στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου (Gal. iv. 3, 9; Col. ii. 8, 20), as we shall find later, also belongs to the same category.

2. St. Paul's Belief in the Dominion of Evil Powers.

That the Apostle was a consistent believer in the existence and dominion of evil spiritual powers is quite manifest from passages such as the following :—

1 Cor. xv. 24, " When He shall have abolished all rule and all authority and power."

Ephes. i. 21, " Far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and every name."

Ephes. iii. 10, " the principalities and powers in the heavenly places."

Any ambiguity that may attach to the meaning of the phrase " principalities and powers " is definitely removed in Ephes. vi. 12, " against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places," where they are clearly ranged on the side of evil.

Col. ii. 15, " having put off from Himself the principalities and powers."

1 Cor. ii. 6, 8, " the rulers of this world," where the reference is probably to spiritual powers and not to earthly rulers as has been generally supposed.

And, further, the Apostle pictures the hosts of spiritual powers that held the world in bondage as being under the leadership of one central sinister and malignant figure, in whose hands are concentrated all their authority and dominion. He appears in the Epistles under various designations such as Beliar, Satan, the Tempter, the Evil One, and the range of his authority and the character of his rule are brought out in two striking descriptions : " the prince of the power (powers?) of the air " (Ephes. ii. 2), and " the god of this world " (2 Cor. iv. 4). He also recognises a definite hierarchy of spiritual beings with grades of rank : Cf. Rom. viii. 38, " angels, principalities, powers "; 1 Cor. xv. 24, " rule, authority,

power"; Ephes. vi. 12, "principalities, powers, world-rulers of this darkness, spiritual hosts of wickedness"; Col. i. 16, "thrones, dominions, principalities, powers," but a comparison of these passages tends to show that he had no clearly formulated or fixed gradation of these various ranks in his mind.

Now, in the matter of the doctrine of the two ages in its general aspect with its belief in the subjection of the present age to the dominion of evil spirits, St. Paul does not manifest any substantial advance upon the teaching of Christ, as illustrated in the Gospels, or upon that of the primitive Christian community. But in his outlook upon the world of spirits there are certain factors wherein he does make a radical departure from anything taught previously in Christian circles.

3. *St. Paul's Doctrine of Angels.*

The factor in the Apostle's view of the world of spirits which is most significant and constitutes the widest gulf between himself and other early Christian teachers on this point is his failure to differentiate materially between the angels, regarded as a class of spiritual beings, and the other inhabitants of the spirit-world, so that we are almost compelled to conclude that St. Paul regarded even angels as being ranged on the side of evil. If we compare Rom. viii. 38, where "angels, principalities, powers" stand side by side in the same category, with Ephes. vi. 12 and Col. i. 16, quoted above, it is difficult to see any real distinction between the angels and the other spiritual forces enumerated in these lists, forces which are unequivocally hostile to God and man. It is true that "angels" are found in only one of the series, but in the very passage where the term is found "angels" rank as a power that is, even if we take the most favourable view, a hindrance to the Christian's access to God.

There is also a further characteristic peculiar to St. Paul, which possibly explains his somewhat strange and unexpected attitude towards "angels," viz. the

close connection that he establishes between the spirit-world, whose sway is the mark of the present age, and the Law. We find the first trace of this connection between the world of spirits and the Law as it existed in the Apostle's mind in Gal. iii. 19, "It was ordained through angels in the hand of a mediator," where the inferiority of the Law and a somewhat depreciatory view of angels are clearly to the fore; but this thought is much more explicitly and more forcibly expressed in Col. ii. 14, 15, where the abolition of the Law by the death of the Cross goes hand-in-hand with the dethronement of the "principalities and powers," who are apparently identical with the angels who are described as presiding over the Law in Gal. iii. 19. Now, in bringing angels into such a close association with the Cross in its redemptive aspect as would seem to be demanded by a combination of Gal. iii. 19, and Col. ii. 14, 15, St. Paul is breaking entirely new ground. The conception of redemption which governed the primitive Christian community had a definitely apocalyptic character, and meant in the main a deliverance in the future by a victory over the powers of evil at the Last Day; but the Apostle, although he still shared in this apocalyptic expectation and saw in the Second Coming the final and absolute subversion of the enemies of God, looked to the immediate past and not to the distant future in his prevailing view of redemption. For him the deliverance of them that are in Christ has been already accomplished on the Cross, when the spirits who had hitherto held the world in bondage had been dethroned and their power finally broken. But according to a well-established Jewish tradition, mentioned in Deut. xxxiii. 2, and elaborated in Jubilees i. 2, angels had presided over the introduction of the Law, and were its guardians and the administrators of its decrees. St. Stephen utilises the story in Acts vii. 53 to enhance the dignity of the Law, but in St. Paul's mind it takes quite a different colour, and, far from adding glory to the Law, the traditional connection between it and the angels becomes for him the ground

whereon he bases his conviction that *both* were involved in the dethronement which ensued from the victory of Christ on the Cross.

It was by some such path as this, as I imagine, that he arrived at the conclusion that the abolition of the angels went hand-in-hand with the abolition of the Law, and that freedom from the Law meant at the same time freedom from the angels, who, in company with other principalities and powers, held the world in thraldom. In the Apostle's thought angels came to be definitely associated with the first age, which, as being an age of mediators, stood on a comparatively low plane of existence, and, therefore, had to be superseded. With the coming of Christ, all mediation save His own ceased to function and the religious significance of angels consequently came to an end. Cf. Heb. ii. 5, "Not unto angels did He subject the world to come."

We find traces of the same type of thought in a further expression which occurs both in *Galatians* and *Colossians*. When the Apostle in Gal. iii. 19 is speaking of angels and their connection with the Law, we find him introducing a few verses lower down, where he is still concerned with this association, the phrase στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου (iv. 3, 9), which appears again in Col. ii. 8, where it is equated with "philosophy and vain deceit" in a passage which leads up to Col. ii. 14, 15, where the Apostle is again dealing with the subject of the Law and its guardians. Scholars are now inclined to see in this expression the idea of personality and to regard it as denoting the elemental spirits, which in the mind of that day stood behind the phenomena of the material Universe, animating and guiding their movements. (See special note.) We then further gather from a combination of these passages (Gal. iii. 19; iv. 3, 9; Col. ii. 8, 14, 15) that "angels" are placed by St. Paul in the same category as these elemental spirits, "the rudiments of the world" to which the first age was in bondage, and this confirms our impression that he regarded the whole world before Christ, the Jewish world with its Law and presiding

angels and the pagan with astral powers and fates, as a world in slavery, which attained its freedom only through the victory accomplished on the Cross.

Now if it be true, and our inquiry up to this point makes it difficult to come to any other conclusion, that the Apostle included the angels among the "principalities and powers" that tyrannised over the first age, it follows from Col. i. 20 that they also are brought within the scope of the reconciliation effected in Christ, and that the angels like other spiritual powers occupy in his mind a position which is in some sense antagonistic to God. And this impression receives still further confirmation from a comparison of 1 Cor. ii. 6, 8, with Col. ii. 15. In the former passage St. Paul speaks of "the rulers of this world" as "crucifying the Lord of Glory" and as "coming to nought," and if, as is now frequently recognised, these "rulers of this world" are not the human rulers like Herod and Pilate who hounded Christ to His death but the spiritual beings who are elsewhere designated "principalities and powers," we are in the same region of thought as in Col. ii. 15, where the same "principalities and powers" are rendered impotent by the death of the Cross. Thus by a very simple algebraical formula, angels = principalities and powers = the rulers of this world, we seem forced to admit that St. Paul in some of his moods actually placed angels among the forces that were hostile to God and man, and were instrumental in compassing the death of Christ. It is also quite clear that it is not "evil angels" merely that are in question, but the angels who presided over the Law, the very beings who were held in the highest esteem and reverence by all right-thinking Jews and by the great majority of Christians.

But, even if we hesitate to accept what must be to many a somewhat startling suggestion, there can be no question that the attitude of St. Paul towards the angels and his view of their character, their functions, and their relation to God, were separated from the teaching of Christ and of the early Christian writers on the same

subject by a very wide gulf. Both in the *Gospels* and in *Acts* angels are the objects of supreme reverence and almost of adoration. They are " the angels in heaven," God's messengers and ministers to men, the bearers of the faithful departed to the realm of Paradise, the army of the Lord executing judgment upon His disobedient and ungrateful subjects, the reapers at the Great Harvest, who share in the glory of the Parousia and are the assessors of Christ when He sits on the throne of Judgment. And then we come to St. Paul, who, to say the very least, places angels on a comparatively low plane of spiritual existence and frequently employs language concerning them which is depreciatory and savours of comparative contempt. How are we to explain this very marked cleavage between the doctrine of angels, as held by the Evangelists and the primitive Christians, and St. Paul's view of this matter? [1]

The main explanation, it seems to me, lies along the line of the Apostle's experience, in which we include not only the course of his own spiritual growth in Christ, but also the manifold conditions and situations with which he was faced during the years of his missionary activity. The stages in the process which led to his ultimate estimate of angels and their functions were somewhat as follows :—

1. He accepted whole-heartedly the current view of the world in bondage to spiritual powers of varying types, and in virtue of his Christian belief he learnt to conceive the redemption wrought in Christ as the deliverance of that world, and the victory of the Cross as the dethronement of " the world-rulers of this darkness " by the Redeemer.

2. The next stage in the process was the inclusion of the Law and the angels, who were its guardians, within the category of the powers that tyrannised over the first

[1] Language with reference to angels approaching that of St. Paul in its tone is found in 1 St. Peter iii. 22, but this is probably only an echo of what the writer was familiar with in the Pauline Epistles.

age. This was largely the result of the Judaistic controversy and the demand on the part of the Judaising Christians that submission to the Jewish ceremonial Law was imperative for all Gentile converts. The trend of the Apostle's thought in this direction can be traced very clearly in Gal. ii. 4; iv. 8, 9, in the recurring emphasis upon the Law as connoting the idea of "bondage." He was led by the exigencies of the controversy to set the Law and the Gospel against each other as complete antitheses. From this point of view the Law became a "curse," and the legal system and everything connected with it became an essential factor in the state of slavery and oppression from which the world was freed by the death of Christ. But angels were, in Jewish tradition, intimately associated with the Law as its promulgators and patrons, and they, consequently, came to share in the ignominy which attached to the law, and to be included among the "principalities and powers" that ruled and oppressed that world.

3. The situation at Colossæ was the culminating factor in the development of St. Paul's depreciatory estimate of angels. It is clear from a study of the Epistles that what we may call his critical attitude towards these spiritual beings increased in intensity with the advance of time and the growth of experience. In the earlier Epistles angels are associated by him, as by the Evangelists, with the glory of Christ's Second Coming, but there is a marked change in the tone of his language concerning them in *Galatians*, and this reaches its climax in the Epistle with which we are now concerned. Both in Galatia and at Colossæ it was the local situation that was largely responsible for the conception of angels and their functions which became uppermost in the Apostle's mind. In Colossæ the worship of angels was an integral factor, and indeed the ruling constituent, in the heresy which was threatening the Church in that city, and this naturally intensified the feeling of contempt for angels which already possessed the Apostle in some degree, and provoked the stern condemnation of the whole spirit-

world for which the false teachers put forth such far-reaching claims.

What these claims were may be gathered from the oblique references that we find in St. Paul's statement in this Epistle of what true Christianity contains and signifies. They bring us back again to a world where God is inaccessible and where the space that separates the finite from the Infinite is filled by a host of mediators. As against this so-called " philosophy," which postulated a series of spiritual or angelic mediatorial beings, the successive links in a chain binding man to God, the Apostle sets the doctrine of the Eternal Son begotten before the worlds. Where the Colossian heretics claimed for these intermediate agencies a share in the Divine nature and a part in the creation and government of the world, and, consequently, a measure of worship, St. Paul boldly proclaims Christ as the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe, the beginning and the end of all things, and the supreme Head of the Church, and, as a necessary corollary, the one and sole object of worship.

According to the heretical theory the plenitude of the Deity was distributed and diluted among these spiritual mediators, but St. Paul insists that in Christ there resides the totality of the Divine, the πλήρωμα of God. Christ is also the reconciler of all things to God, including these spiritual beings themselves, a statement which leads us to infer that the heretics also ascribed a reconciling agency to the angels that they worshipped.

It is this " angel-cult " with its many ramifications that constituted the very heart of the Colossian heresy, and it is necessary to bear this constantly in mind if we would enter fully into the meaning of St. Paul's counter-statement, as contained in this Epistle, and understand his depreciatory estimate of the angels.

It was the angelology of the Colossian heretics, culminating in angel worship, that was the crowning danger that menaced the Christian Church in that city, and it is to the demolition of this perversion and all that it connoted that the Apostle bends all his energies. He realises

to the full the temptation that arises from the tendency that is endemic among men to worship what is near and accessible as against the distant and inaccessible, or, in other words, to worship angels and not God.

That angel worship was a grave reality in early Christian days, and created a problem that needed firm handling, is proved by the repeated injunctions against any such adoration in *Revelation* (xix. 10; xxii. 8), and its prevalence in later days is attested by an apocryphal work, *The Preaching of Peter*, and by the accusations which Celsus directed against the Jews. There were plausible reasons put forward by the heretics in favour of the practice. It was a commendable mark of humility and a confession of human weakness (Col. ii. 23), this natural shrinking of sinful humanity from intruding itself into the presence of the Most High God. When heaven seemed so far beyond the reach of earth, it was surely feasible to grasp at the lower links of the chain which bound the one to the other, and so mount up to God by means of the successive stages which joined the finite to the Infinite!

The Place assigned to Christ in the Heretical System.

That Christ was in some way brought into the heretical scheme of things and was assigned a position of some sort in the mediatorial hierarchy is clear, because no doctrinal system in which Christ had no part could be a serious menace to the Christian Church. And this supposition is borne out by the method adopted by the Apostle in refuting the false teaching. In i. 15 ff. he appears to be countering a theory which assigned to Christ some functions in the government of the world, but denied His supremacy. And again the same perversion seems to be in St. Paul's mind in ii. 19, where he speaks of the heretics as "not holding the Head," an expression which implies that Christ was given some place and power in the Church. It would appear, therefore, that Christ was given a modicum of privilege and honour in the heretical

system, but the homage due to Him as the Head was withheld, and He was only regarded as one member of the wide organism of mediatorial agencies, but not set on the highest pinnacle. It is only on some such supposition as this that we can understand why the Apostle took such a grave view of the situation at Colossæ, and saw in the prevailing heresy a vital danger to the Church. It was an attack upon the very heart of the Christian faith, which by its derogatory attitude towards Christ deprived Christianity of life, significance, and force.

To return once more to the question of St. Paul's estimate of the angels, it may be well to say that it is probable that, if he were discussing angels and their functions quite dispassionately and apart from any controversial exigencies, he would place them as being on the whole on God's side and not against Him. His attitude in this matter is entirely governed by the angle from which the subject is approached. For him, as for other Christians of his day, angels would in themselves be objects of esteem and reverence, and it was only when a doctrine of angels threatened the purity of the Christian faith and placed angelic mediators in the position that of right belonged to Christ that his attitude towards them underwent the transformation the results of which are so clearly discernible in this Epistle. His thought with reference to angels follows the line of his thought with reference to the Law. The Law was in itself good and holy, but when it is set up as a rival to the Gospel it becomes, for St. Paul, a curse. So the angels may in themselves be the servants of God and the assessors of Christ at the Last Day, but when they are set against the Son and threaten His supremacy, even they are numbered among the " principalities and powers " who are triumphantly dethroned by the death of the Cross.

The Subsidiary Elements in the Heresy.

The other elements in the heresy which we have previously enumerated, viz. the emphasis upon ritual obligation, the asceticism it inculcated, and its claim to be a "philosophy," do not call for detailed comment inasmuch they are only subsidiary to the main interest, the worship of angels, and derive their significance from it.

The heresy undoubtedly constituted a grave menace to the Colossian Church, because of the claim put forward with considerable plausibility that as a system it was immeasurably superior to Christianity. This claim to superiority was based mainly on its alleged comprehensiveness. The heretics would assert that their system represented a religion that was universal in its scope, so that every race, nation, religious cult and philosophy would find in it the completest satisfaction of its desires. Christians, Jews, Greeks, Phrygians, semi-Gnostics would one and all discover in it just that element in which each section was particularly interested. To attract the Christian a lip service was accorded to Christ and some kind of position assigned to Him in the scheme of things. To content the Hellenistic Jew, who in the interests of propaganda was often prepared to make concessions and to adopt ideas abhorrent to orthodox Judaism, respect was paid to the ceremonial Law in the matter of circumcision and the observance of feast days and sabbaths. For the satisfaction of the cultured Greek the movement at Colossæ claimed to be pre-eminently a philosophy, and indeed assumed a monopoly of philosophic truth, arrogating to itself the title so contemptuously commented upon by St. Paul in ii. 8 of "the philosophy" beside which all other philosophies were of no account. For the Phrygian, acclimatised to the orgiastic cults of Attis and Cybele, it offered the delights of ecstasy and the privilege of mystic visions; while the semi-Gnostic would be drawn to it by its doctrine of æons and spiritual beings that

filled the void separating man from God, by its practice of ascetism, and by its claim to the exclusive possession of esoteric wisdom.

It offered an attraction for all in the fact that it was an easy religion, an attraction that man in all ages finds difficult to resist. It made no substantial call for any determined spiritual effort, and it proposed to make the pathway to God simple and accessible to all. God was far off, dwelling in the inaccessible heights of heaven, but the angels were near at hand, and in an ascending series of ranks reached from man to God. Union with these was feasible, and through them a kind of union with God was attainable. Again, the ascetic practices led to visions, visions brought about intimate association with the spirit-world, and familiarity with the world of spirits granted to its possessor what was the culminating point of the whole process, the higher wisdom, "the philosophy," which to the Hellenistic world was the most precious of all human privileges. Thus the Colossian heresy was a remarkable syncretism, a blend of almost every idea current in the world of that day, with the cult of angels as its centre and cohesive force—a strange compound, which dissolved into its constituent elements when confronted by the mordant criticism of St. Paul and the comprehensive statement in which he unfolds the inexorable claims of Christ.

History is ever repeating itself, and no department of life and thought confirms the truth of this saying more strongly than the history of heresy. Modern heretical movements such as theosophy, which is only an old heresy that comes to the surface again and again, spiritualism, and Christian Science, all remind us of that strange movement at Colossæ which stirred the heart of St. Paul to its very depths. In their central elements they are all remarkably similar to the Colossian heresy. They too loudly assert the superiority of their systems to orthodox Christianity; they are all in accord with each other in assigning a certain place to Christ, but not the supreme place that is His due, and they all move on

a low plane of real spirituality and demand no high degree of spiritual effort and idealism. As the heretical mind and temperament remain much the same in all ages, the Christian counter-statement must be still that which was put forth by St. Paul, the proclamation of Christ in all the fulness of His being and functions.

Although St. Paul in the matter of angelology is essentially the child of his age and is dealing with categories which have now little meaning, yet he has rendered a valuable service to the cause of pure religion. Closely as he adhered to conceptions which were the commonplace of his religious environment, he did not leave them where he found them, but was careful to dispossess them of the tyranny which they had hitherto exercised over the minds of men. He found a world upon which the belief in the power and relentless oppression of invisible spirits lay like a nightmare, and he delivered it from a burden that had become unendurable. He believed in angels, and the dominion that they were supposed to wield over the lives of men was a stern reality to him, but he set himself to show, with all the force at his command, that they possessed no shadow of right to the religious regard of men, and that whatever power they may have had in the age that had now gone by had been completely broken in the face of Christ. He set the Christian on the high road leading to religious freedom and joy in the fellowship of Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER III

THE PAULINE ANTIDOTE—THE ALL-SUFFICIENCY OF CHRIST

I. St. Paul's Method of Argument.

St. Paul was confronted at Colossæ by an heretical movement of serious import, which must infallibly undermine the faith of the Christian community in that city if it were allowed to work its will and to proceed on its course without let or hindrance. The heresy constituted a grave danger, because, superficially regarded, it seemed to be based on praiseworthy motives and to be operating in the interests of true religion. Underlying the speculations which were its distinguishing mark was the sense of the unapproachable Majesty of God and of the immeasurable gulf separating earth from heaven, a conception widely current in that age and pressing heavily upon the minds and hearts of men, and so producing an intense yearning for some system of mediation which would bridge this chasm and bring together the finite and the Infinite. It was in its claim to offer the fullest response to this perfectly intelligible sentiment that the crowning attraction of the heretical movement lay. It sought to accomplish its purpose by postulating an elaborate series of spiritual or angelic beings filling the void between God and His creation. Among these spiritual mediators Christ was given a place, the exact nature and position of which we are not able to determine from the somewhat obscure references in our Epistle, although it is clear that He was regarded as one link,

but by no means the highest, in this chain of angelic beings whose services were esteemed of such essential importance to the religious life of man that they were accorded worship and adoration.

To the movement as a whole there was given the high-sounding designation of " the Philosophy," a title which illustrates its claim to be considered a religion which transcended Christianity in its achievements, and promised far richer blessings than those bestowed by the Gospel of Christ as preached at Colossæ by Epaphras. The reality of the religious yearnings underlying this movement, and the attraction of the remedy offered in it are readily recognised by the Apostle, and they are met by a form of reply and defence which is characteristically Pauline. His method is essentially constructive and positive, and it is not until he has placed before the Colossian Christians the full content and significance of the Christian faith that he condescends to make any explicit reference to the heretical standpoint. And meanwhile so overwhelming is the effect upon his mind of the vision of what is involved in Christ and His Redemption, which has dawned upon his soul as he unfolds his doctrinal statement, that when he comes to deal with the heretical speculations there is no longer room for argument, and his attitude towards these is one of comparative impatience and contempt.

In his constructive method of dealing with error St. Paul provides an admirable illustration of how the task of the theologian who is faced by a period of intellectual ferment and spiritual unrest should be accomplished. He will best complete the work of reconstruction who sets himself to adapt the eternal truths of religion to the wants of a new age, and who will do this, not by the simple process of destruction, but by laying hold of the thoughts that express the aspirations and yearnings of the new movement, and by means of these direct men to the revelation of God in Christ as the perfect satisfaction of every craving rooted in the religious nature. He will also, as St. Paul did, bring men to " Christ in whom are

all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden" (Col. ii. 13).[1]

The Apostle's method, then, of countering the many claims of this variegated religious perversion that was beginning to make headway at Colossæ was to set Christ at the very outset in His right place in the Universe, and to show that in Him, and in Him only, every claim which the heresy professed to meet received its fullest satisfaction, every religious yearning its due reward, and every spiritual difficulty its adequate solution. In his doctrine of the all-sufficiency of Christ he offers the most effective antidote to the heretical poison. The heart of the Epistle is, therefore, contained in that section of the first chapter in which the Apostle, in language of inspired eloquence and with a preciseness and fulness not found in any previous letter, elaborates his conception of the Person of Christ.

In this respect *Colossians* marks a new epoch in the course of St. Paul's development as a theologian. The Judaistic controversy had been brought to a successful issue, and the ideal of a Church in which Jews and Gentiles should be included on a footing of complete equality was now an accomplished reality. The enforced rest from active employment during his imprisonments at Cæsarea and Rome had given him the leisure he needed for working out in his mind the full implications of the Christian Gospel. It was then that his view of what was involved in God's eternal purpose was so far widened, that he was enabled to enter into a remarkably full and clear understanding of the significance and achievement of the redemption wrought in Christ. It so happened, therefore, that when the situation at Colossæ was brought to his knowledge he was most adequately equipped to deal with it promptly and effectively. The new light thrown upon the Person and Office of Christ in this Epistle, with its wealth of fresh expressions and ideas, shows the extent to which his long and leisured

[1] Somerville, *St. Paul's Conception of Christ*, p. 155.

meditation upon the conception of Christ as the Eternal Son of God had influenced the Apostle's intellectual and spiritual growth. And yet this progress is all along the line of his previous thinking, and is essentially of a Pauline type. The advance so markedly illustrated by our Epistle is a natural, orderly, and perfectly intelligible working out to their fullest capacity of ideas which, in their germ or in a less developed form, are plainly discernible in his earlier Epistles.

II. The Doctrine of the Person of Christ, i. 15–20.

St. Paul's doctrine of the Person of Christ is presented in a series of statements in i. 15–20, where the relation of Christ (1) to God, (2) to the Universe, (3) to the Church, is elaborated on lines so broad and comprehensive as to bear eloquent testimony to the treasures of knowledge, new and old, that are now the possession of the writer.

(i) *The Relation of Christ to God*, i. 15.

ὅς ἐστιν εἰκὼν τοῦ Θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου. The transition from the Apostle's prayer for the Colossian Church to the doctrinal statement is effected by the introduction of the phrase "the Son of His love" in i. 13. This is for him the all-dominating factor in his thought of Christ, and the doctrinal passage which follows is merely the unfolding and elaboration of what he found in the conception of Christ as the Eternal Son of God. Beginning with the very foundation of all Christological truth, the relation of Christ to the Father, he lays down, in terms that were perfectly familiar to the heretics and perhaps actually current among them, the proposition that He is "the image of the invisible God." Many of the false teachers were influenced in some degree by Judaism as it was represented at Alexandria, and especially by Philo, in whose writings this very phrase

is found in relation to the Logos, which was a philosophical conception employed by him to denote, in a metaphysical sense, the principle of self-communication in the Godhead. The term "the image of God" has already been used by the Apostle as a designation of Christ in 2 Cor. iv. 4, but it is quite clear that neither in that Epistle nor in *Colossians* is the Apostle dealing with metaphysics, and that it is as a truth of religion that Christ is declared to be "the image of God." It is here introduced in order to combat two ideas which were widely prevalent in that age, and were prominent factors in the Colossian heresy. Angels and spiritual beings were frequently spoken of as "sons of God," and it is more than probable that in the angel-cult at Colossæ they were thus honoured, and that Christ Himself was given a place among these "sons." As against this perversion the Apostle sets forth Christ as the Son in a unique and absolute sense, the very image and embodiment of the Father and the complete revelation of His nature, possessing a Sonship that both in kind and degree distinguishes Him from every other being, spiritual or human, who may in some sense be called a "son of God."

The second idea which the Apostle seems to have in view is that which regarded God as transcendent, inconceivable, and inaccessible, an idea which, as we have seen, lay at the very root of the heretical movement and necessitated the setting up of an elaborate system of angelic mediators between God and man. It was a commonplace of religious thought at this time, and traces of its influence are frequent in Scripture. The very phrase "the image of the invisible" is a tacit allusion to the prevailing belief, to which expression is given in such passages as St. John i. 18, "No man hath seen God at any time," and 1 Tim. vi. 16, "dwelling in light unapproachable; whom no man hath seen nor can see." The heretic solved the difficulty that arose from the conception of God as transcendent and inconceivable, by postulating a series of emanations from the Godhead

by whose agency a knowledge of God might be attained and the invisible made visible, and it is mainly against this type of speculation that St. Paul directs the statement that Christ as the Son is " the image of the invisible God." Christ is for him not *a* manifestation of God and a revelation of some particular aspect of the Deity and, consequently, only a partner who shared this privilege with other spiritual beings, but *the* perfect and complete manifestation and image of God. In Christ the invisible God has become fully visible, and is revealed in every attribute of His Divine Being. It is this conception, but in another form, that underlies the Johannine doctrine of the Logos, where the figure employed speaks of the Divine mind and utterance being made intelligible and audible to human capacities, and the writer of *The Epistle to the Hebrews* also uses language which is strongly reminiscent of St. Paul's when he describes the Son as being " the effulgence of His (the Father's) glory and the image of His substance " (Heb. i. 3). But it is the religious truth underlying the proposition that makes it of vital importance in every age. " In Christ we have the revelation of a God who can be known and loved and trusted, with a knowledge which although it is not complete is real and valid, with a love which is solid enough to be the foundation of a life, with a trust that it has touched rock and builds secure." Against the shadowy, visionary speculations of the heretics the Apostle sets the certain and unquestionable knowledge of God, to which the Christian attains in Christ and in Him alone.

(ii) *The Relation of Christ to the Universe,* i. 15*b*–17.

The second point in St. Paul's Christological statement is the relation of Christ to the Universe, which is explained in a series of pregnant clauses in i. 15*b*–17. There is a fundamental connection between these clauses and that which precedes them, because the place and function of the Son in the Universe arise from His unique Sonship,

in virtue of which He is the complete and perfect manifestation of God.

(*a*) πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως, 15*b*. There is some doubt as to the exact significance of πρωτότοκος in this clause. In its primary meaning the term would certainly denote priority in point of time, and if we were tied down to this original sense of the word we should have no option but to assume that St. Paul had in mind here nothing more than the distinction of Christ from the rest of the Universe. But the context seems to require a wider connotation in πρωτότοκος than that of mere priority, and the use of the word in Scripture and elsewhere warrants the suggestion that the Apostle meant to express not only the priority of Christ in point of time to all creation, and incidentally the pre-existence of the Divine Son, but also His sovereignty and dominion over all creation. Because He was the firstborn the privilege of dominion was His by right. This wide sense of πρωτότοκος may be
27 illustrated from Psalm lxxxix. 28, πρωτότοκον θήσομαι αὐτὸν ὑψηλὸν παρὰ τοῖς βασιλεῦσιν τῆς γῆς, "I will make Him my first-born, far above the kings of the earth," where the idea of sovereignty is quite explicit. In Heb. i. 2, where the writer appears to have this passage from the Psalms in mind, the Son is declared to be κληρονόμος πάντων, and here again the term "heir" involves the corresponding idea of authority.

What St. Paul is mainly concerned with at this point is the superiority of Christ to the spirit-powers which played such a commanding rôle in the heretical system, and πᾶσα κτίσις, which is dependent upon πρωτότοκος, should, therefore, be taken in a distributive sense as denoting "every creature," and not collectively as in the R. V., in which it is translated "all creation." When we have a choice of renderings, as in the present instance, we shall do well to bear in mind what factor in the heresy the Apostle is refuting, and select the translation that reveals most clearly the contrast between the claims of the heretics on behalf of the

spirit-world and the counter-claims put forward by St. Paul on behalf of Christ. "Every creature" is a perfectly legitimate representative of πᾶσα κτίσις, and we shall adopt it here as doing more justice to the context than its rival "all creation." It completes the idea of supremacy latent in πρωτότοκος, and it extends that idea so as to cover the supremacy of Christ over every living creature, both in the spiritual and material worlds. It is the dominion of the Son over spiritual beings that is doubtless primarily in view, but, inasmuch as all material things were in that day regarded as having their counterparts in the spiritual world and even as having souls of their own, the reference need not be taken in a narrow sense. The Son is declared to be the Lord and Ruler of all life, both material and spiritual, with the accent perhaps upon His supremacy over every spiritual existence.

I may remind the reader of the prominent part played by this particular clause in the Arian controversy, where it was quoted by the heretics as proving unquestionably that the Son was a creature and as such only distinguished from men in degree and not in kind. But the grammar of the passage does not necessarily imply the interpretation put upon it by the Arians, because the Genitive in πάσης κτίσεως is not Partitive, but the Genitive of Comparison, a usage which is familiar enough in Greek prose and is not unknown in English literature. A well-known instance of this Genitive occurs in Milton's couplet :—

> "Adam, the goodliest of men since born,
> His sons, the fairest of her daughters, Eve."

Christ was not merely the eldest in the great family of God's creatures, but the first, and, in virtue of his primogeniture, Lord of All.

(*b*) i. 16. The Apostle has declared Christ to be the πρωτότοκος in virtue of His unique Sonship, and he now adds a further ground for this statement. Christ

is also the πρωτότοκος in virtue of His function in the process of creation. ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα . . . τὰ πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἔκτισται. It is important to notice the repeated emphasis on τὰ πάντα, which occurs four times in the course of this and the following verses. It is the absolute supremacy of Christ as against every assumption contained in the heresy that is insisted upon in this passage. The functions of Christ in the process of creation are described by three prepositional phrases, ἐν αὐτῷ, δι' αὐτοῦ, εἰς αὐτόν, which represent the threefold relation of the Son to the Universe.

1. ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα. Christ is the creative centre, the penultimate source of the life of the Universe, the motive power of its development, and the force which controls its every movement. There are two points to be noted in this clause. (1) The Aorist denotes the historical act of creation at a definite point of time. (2) The emphasis on τὰ πάντα confirms our interpretation of πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως as "the first-born in comparison with every creature," because here the Creator is definitely separated from the creature, and a strict line of demarcation is drawn between the First-born, the Creator, and the Universe, which is the work of His hands.

2. δι' αὐτοῦ. The Son is also the agent in Creation and the medium of the Divine energy. He is this again in virtue of being "the image of the invisible God." Similar language is used by Philo in describing the function of the Logos in the creation and government of the world, and this is taken over by New Testament writers when they speak of the relation of the Incarnate Son to creation. Cf. St. John. i. 3, πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο; Heb. i. 2, 3, δι' οὗ καὶ ἐποίησε τοὺς αἰῶνας, ὃς ὢν ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης, where there is the same close connection between the conception of the Son as "the image of God" and that of His function in creation as we have in this Epistle. St. Paul has already made use of the expression δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα in relation to Christ in 1 Cor. viii. 6.

3. εἰς αὐτὸν ἔκτισται. The Son is not only the creative centre of the Universe, the Divine medium of its life, the Director of its movements, the mediating Agent through Whom the essential connection between the Father and His creation is maintained, but is also the very goal of the Universe; He is the Omega as well as the Alpha of God's creative purpose. Creation proceeded from unity and it must end in unity, the centre of which is Christ. The Perfect ἔκτισται is used here in contrast to the Aorist ἐκτίσθη of the preceding clause, showing that, while in the one case it is an act at a definite point of time that is in view, in the present clause we are concerned with a continuous and permanent relation between the Creator and His handiwork. We have already (p. 5) referred to the difficulty arising from this passage, inasmuch as the Apostle is here attributing functions to the Son which in previous Epistles he has definitely accorded to the Father. In Rom. xi. 36 we have a statement which corresponds almost verbally with the verse we are discussing, ὅτι ἐξ αὐτοῦ καὶ δι' αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν τὰ πάντα, and here unquestionably it is God (the Father) that is in view and not Christ, and again in 1 Cor. viii. 6 there seems to be a careful distinction between ἐξ and εἰς as applied to the Father and the διὰ used with reference to the Son. There would, therefore, seem to be a definite advance in this passage upon any previous Pauline doctrinal statement concerning the relation between Christ and the Universe, and this, as we have already remarked, has been urged as a sound reason for suspecting the authenticity of *Colossians*. But, as we then pointed out, the Apostle is only vitally concerned in this Epistle with the functions and place of Christ in the Universe. There was no controversy between him and the heretics concerning God as the Absolute, and St. Paul, therefore, concentrates his attention upon what is due to Christ. The stage represented here may be compared with that described in 1 Cor. xv. 25, "He must reign till He hath put all enemies under His feet." It is true that a further

stage is contemplated in 1 Cor. xv. 28, "Then shall the Son also Himself be subjected to Him that did subject all things unto Him, that God may be all in all," but in our Epistle it is the penultimate stage that is in question, the subjection of all things to the Son before He hands over the Kingdom to the Father. There is in *Colossians*, therefore, only an extension and not a contradiction of previous Pauline doctrine, and even that extension is foreshadowed in St. Matt. xxviii. 18, where the risen Christ says of Himself, "All authority hath been given unto Me in heaven and upon earth."

ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, τὰ ὁρατὰ καὶ τὰ ἀόρατα, εἴτε θρόνοι, εἴτε κυριότητες, εἴτε ἀρχαί, εἴτε ἐξουσίαι. It is at this point that the first clear clue to the character of the heresy against which this great Christological passage is directed emerges. The main significance of the comprehensive exposition of the cosmic place and functions of Christ that we meet here consists in the repeated emphasis on the fact that His creative energy lay at the root not only of all material being, but that the world of spirits also owed its existence to Him. While the Colossian heretics placed Christ somewhere in their cosmic scheme as the equal, or it may be as the inferior, among other spiritual agencies, the Apostle declares with unhesitating confidence that the Son belongs to an entirely different plane of existence from these, and is as distinct from them as the Creator is distinct from His creation. It is to Him that they owe their very being, inasmuch as the whole Universe, both in its spiritual and material aspects, is the work of His hands. The material creation may be connected with the earth, and so be visible to the human eye, while its spiritual counterpart is a thing of heaven hidden from the sight of men; but this does not invalidate the eternal truth that "all things were created" in the Son, who is Lord of heaven and earth, to Whom all rulers, wheresoever their dominion is exercised, on earth or in heaven, are subject.

It is not clear whether the spiritual powers that are

enumerated here, θρόνοι, κυριότητες, ἀρχαί, ἐξουσίαι, are placed in a formulated and definite order of rank. A comparison with a corresponding enumeration in Ephes. i, 21, ἀρχή, ἐξουσία, δύναμις, κυριότης, does not afford much assistance in deciding the point. There are three terms which are common to both lists, but whereas κυριότης precedes ἀρχή and ἐξουσία in *Colossians*, the process is reversed in *Ephesians*. The Apostle may be quoting an order current among the heretics, or his list may be a mere reminiscence of Slav. Enoch. xx. 1, where the identical items that appear in this passage are found but in a different order, with "cherubim and seraphim" inserted between ἐξουσίαι and θρόνοι, but without further evidence it is not justifiable to conclude that he had in mind any particular grading of ranks in this spiritual hierarchy. What he is vitally concerned with is to establish the absolute supremacy of Christ over every spiritual being, however high the rank assigned to such by ancient belief might be.

i. 17. καὶ αὐτός ἐστι πρὸ πάντων, καὶ τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκε. This clause has been interpreted in various ways, some of which call for comment.

What is the sense of πρό? Is it used in the usual temporal sense of "before," pointing, therefore, to the pre-existence of Christ, or does it connote superiority or supremacy as we found to be the case with πρωτότοκος? In favour of the first alternative is the consideration that both in St. Paul and in the New Testament generally πρὸ points to priority either of a temporal or strictly local character. But there are instances even in the New Testament as, *e. g.* in St. James v. 12 and 1 Peter iv. 8, where πρὸ πάντων ("above all things") connotes "rank," the thing highest in the order of importance, and this usage is not unknown in classical Greek. It is difficult, however, to understand why this sentence is inserted in the passage if it simply reproduces a thought already expressed in the phrase "the first-born of every creature," and it is more reasonable, therefore, to take πρὸ in the temporal sense, and to regard this as a fresh

statement declaring the pre-existence of Christ before all creation. The *αὐτός*, judging from its position, is meant to be emphatic, and should, therefore, be translated "He Himself," which gives colour to the idea that the Apostle is here insisting not only upon the pre-existence of the Son, but upon His absolute existence as well.

St. Paul's Christological teaching both in this Epistle and in *Philippians* (ii. 5–11) has been interpreted in two markedly different ways. Many scholars of standing have contended that in both Epistles the Apostle is only concerned with the Incarnate Christ, and that the thought of the pre-existence was not present in his mind on either occasion. I have dealt fully with the passage in *Philippians* in my Commentary on that Epistle,[1] where after a very careful consideration of all the salient factors I was led to the conclusion that St. Paul is there dealing with Christ in three separate spheres of existence, the pre-incarnate, the Incarnate, and the Exalted states, and I can find no sound reason for departing from that view in interpreting this passage in *Colossians*. It is true that what the Apostle has primarily in his mind here is the Exalted Christ and His present relation to the Universe, but all through his exposition he appears to assume the pre-existence of the Son, and in this particular clause he seems to declare it explicitly.

Καὶ τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκε. The Son, Who is the medium of the life of the Universe and the Father's agent in creation, is also its centre of unity and the force that alone gives it cohesion and stability. His is the power by means of which the Universe becomes an ordered and regulated whole, with all its parts in their right places and with all its antagonisms reconciled. He is the key-stone of the arch, and without Him the whole edifice would dissolve into its constituent factors and perish irretrievably.

[1] *The Epistle to the Philippians* (Westminster Commentaries), pp. lxxii–lxxxi.

(iii) *The Relation of Christ to the Church,* i. 18–20.

The Apostle now passes on to consider the relation of Christ to the Church, and in this section again he has clearly in view the claims of the heresy in which Christ was placed in a position of inferiority as compared with other spiritual powers, not only as touching His function in the creation and government of the world, but also in reference to the work of redemption and His significance in the life of the Church. St. Paul now declares Christ to be not only supreme in the domain of the Universe, but to be also equally supreme in the Church. It will be noted that there is a close parallel between the passage in which he unfolds his doctrine of the relation of Christ to the Universe and this passage where the corresponding relation of Christ to the Church is elaborated. As in the Universe He is the First in time and in dignity, so in the Church He is the Beginning and the Head, and as in the former He is the medium of all life and its motive and cohesive power, so in the latter He is the channel through Whom it also derives all its spiritual life as well as its Ruler and Centre of Unity. The distinctive term "First-born" is employed in both passages, but with a slight difference of application.

i. 18. Καὶ *αὐτός ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος, τῆς ἐκκλησίας.* This statement is a continuation and extension of Pauline teaching which is extant in the earlier Epistles. The Apostle has already described the Church as a *σῶμα, i. e.* a unified organism in Rom. xii. 5, 1 Cor. xii. 27, and has declared Christ to be the *κεφαλή* thereof in 1 Cor. xi. 3; but the two ideas have been hitherto kept apart, whereas in this clause they are brought closely together. What is new in this Epistle is not so much the doctrine concerning Christ and His Church as the phraseology in which that doctrine is expressed. In the previous Epistles it is mainly the function of the Spirit to mediate life to the Church, but although the idea of the indwelling Spirit underlies the whole structure of

thought in *Colossians* it is nowhere explicitly defined. The language of this Epistle, where Christ as the Head and the Church as His Body are brought into the most intimate connection, while it includes the idea of the Spirit and His function, enlarges and enriches the conception of the relationship existing between Christ and His Church, because it introduces two new elements, viz. the dominion of Christ and the organic unity that exists between the two entities. Christ is now not only the medium of the Church's life, but as its Head He is also its supreme Ruler and the source of its unity. The phraseology also brings out the distinctiveness of Christ from the Church as well as His fellowship with it, and there is inherent in it the suggestion that the Church is a " body," not so much because its members constitute an organic unity, but because it is an organism which is Christ's very own, sharing His life, as the body shares in the life of the head, and even making His experiences its own in the intimacy of the fellowship that is established between them.

The emphasis on the Headship as connoting dominion and authority may be due to the situation that had arisen in the Pauline world generally, with its many scattered communities and their variety of gifts and organisations, which imperatively demanded the assertion of a supreme and central authority to Whom the whole Church was subject. As the Head of the Church Christ is not only the source of its life, but, and this is a new idea which makes its first appearance in this Epistle, He is also its supreme Ruler. The term " Head " has also a special significance here in view of the Colossian heresy. In a later verse (ii. 19) the Apostle describes the heretics as " not holding fast the Head," from which we gather, as we have already explained (p. 43), that in the heretical system Christ was given a part and place in the government of the Church, but not the place of honour, not the supreme Headship which the Apostle now claims for Him.

ὅς ἐστιν ἀρχή, πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν. Here again,

as in the case of πρὸ πάντων in the preceding verse, it is a moot point whether ἀρχὴ has the sense of priority in time or whether it denotes superiority. The combination of ἀρχὴ and πρωτότοκος may, however, indicate the presence of both ideas in this clause, and show that the Apostle intends to teach that Christ is the Head of the Church (1) because He is the first that entered upon a life that had overthrown death, and (2) because in virtue of that victory over death He now reigns as the living Lord who shall finally abolish death as well as every other rule, authority, and power (1 Cor. xv. 24, 26). The statement would then complete the notion of Headship, which now involves not only the conception of Christ as the source of the Church's life and its Ruler, but also His further privilege as a King Who reigns in virtue of His complete victory over every foe that barred His way to His Eternal Throne.

ἵνα γένηται ἐν πᾶσιν αὐτὸς πρωτεύων. The verb in this clause is different from that employed in the corresponding clause in ver. 17. There Christ ἐστι πρὸ πάντων, here He γένηται ἐν πᾶσιν πρωτεύων. Christ *is* supreme in the Universe in virtue of being the Son, the image of the invisible God, but He *becomes* the Head of the Church in virtue of His Incarnation, Passion and Resurrection. The supremacy is as absolute in the one case as in the other, but it is based on different foundations.

i. 19. ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ εὐδόκησε πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα κατοικῆσαι. Before we proceed to interpret this passage we have first of all to settle a point of grammar, and decide what to take as the subject of the verb εὐδόκησε. In both our English Versions Θεός is supplied from the context and utilised as the Nominative, but this is by no means the only available suggestion. Some scholars make πλήρωμα itself the subject, while others favour the introduction of υἱός or Χριστός in place of the Θεός adopted in the English Versions. The second of these three suggestions is not very plausible, partly because the

expression " all the fulness was well pleased " is strange in itself, but mainly because we should have to translate the following sentence as " the fulness was pleased to reconcile all things unto Him," which is manifestly unsatisfactory. The choice, therefore, would seem to lie between Θεός and υἱός (Χριστός). While it is true that " the Son " is the subject of the preceding passage as a whole, yet at this point St. Paul is summing up the eternal purpose of God which he has outlined in the previous verses, and, in spite of the statement contained in τὰ πάντα εἰς αὐτὸν ἔκτισται in ver. 16, it is more in accordance with Pauline thought in general to regard the consummation as realised in the Father and not in the Son. And further, the δι' αὐτοῦ of the following clause seems to correspond to the δι' αὐτοῦ of ver. 16, where the reference is unquestionably to the Son as the Father's agent in creation, and if this be so the Apostle is pointing here to the Son as the Father's agent, also, in the process of reconciliation. On the whole, therefore, Θεός, both in the matter of grammar and sense, seems to fit the situation best as the subject of εὐδόκησε.

The exact meaning of πλήρωμα also presents a question of some difficulty. The corresponding verb πληροῦν has two significations, and may mean either " to fill " or " to fulfil," and so πλήρωμα may be rendered in the sense of " plenitude " or as " fulfilment " in the sense of *complement*. It was generally taken in the former sense in this passage, but authorities differed in their views of what was meant by this *plenitude*. Lightfoot and other scholars inserted Θεότητος as the Genitive to be supplied after πλήρωμα, and interpreted the passage as implying the eternal indwelling in the Son of the totality of the Divine attributes and powers. But there are serious difficulties of a strictly theological character, into which we need not enter, which militate against this interpretation, and it has the further disadvantage that it is not strongly supported by the context. The very intimate connection between this statement and that of God's purpose in reconciling the Universe through

the blood of the Cross, seems to demand a meaning in "plenitude" that will bring it into vital connection with this reconciling function of Christ. Recent opinion among those who adopt "plenitude" as the equivalent of πλήρωμα is, therefore, in favour of seeing in this latter term "the fulness of Divine grace" with which the Son was endowed by the Father at the moment of Incarnation, in virtue of which His death had atoning value. The truth enunciated here would then correspond in some degree to the Johannine statement, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us . . . full of grace and truth" (St. John i. 14).

A different interpretation is, however, very confidently put forward by Dr. Armitage Robinson in his Commentary on *Ephesians*. He takes πλήρωμα in the sense of *complement*, as indicating that without which Christ is incomplete, and from this standpoint he argues that it is the Church that is designated as the πλήρωμα, the Church which in the purpose of God is destined to produce that completeness in Christ which He now in some sense lacks. As the Church draws towards completion so Christ also draws towards completion, and when the Church is complete Christ Himself will become "all in all" (Col. iii. 11).

Dr. Robinson maintains that this sense of πλήρωμα is confirmed by Col. i. 24, where St. Paul speaks of his own sufferings as "filling up that which is lacking in the afflictions of Christ," thus implying that Christ has not yet suffered all that He is destined to suffer—He continues to suffer in the sufferings of the Church. He also finds a further confirmation of his view in Col. ii. 9, where St. Paul states that ἐν Χριστῷ κατοικεῖ πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος σωματικῶς. Here he takes σωματικῶς as connoting the Church which is the Mystical Body of Christ, and not the human body assumed at the Incarnation. (See special note.) The use of πληροῦν and πλήρωμα both in *Colossians* and *Ephesians* seems to favour this interpretation, and it is also consonant with the figure of Head and Body by means of which

the Apostle in the passage we are now discussing defines the relation between Christ and the Church. As the head is not complete without the body, so Christ is not complete without the Church. This is true even now, because it is through the Church that Christ works on the earth, and it will be more true when the work of redemption has been fully accomplished and the Exalted Christ becomes fully complete as the Head of a fully completed Church (Robinson's *Ephesians*, pp. 42 ff., 87 ff., 100 ff.).

I am not prepared to accept the responsibility of deciding which of these two conflicting views is the more correct. They are both legitimate deductions from the context, and although the second is perhaps more congruous with the general trend of thought underlying the Apostle's language in these two Epistles, on the other hand, the interpretation which assigns to πλήρωμα the sense of "plenitude" is more in accord with his special purpose in *Colossians*, where he is refuting the idea current among the heretics that the "fulness" of Divine life and grace was distributed and dissipated among the many angelic mediators. If the expression is directed against this heretical standpoint it would signify that Christ, as the embodied organ of the Spirit of God, is the "fulness of God" in all the manifoldness of His gifts, powers, and operations, and as such answers to every religious need of man, conveys every grace, and performs every function associated with man's complete redemption. In Christ the age of angelic mediation has been wholly and finally abolished.

The Reconciling Function of Christ, i. 20.

In his exposition of the functions of Christ as the Reconciler the Apostle has in view two ideas that lay at the root of the Colossian heresy, viz. (1) the worship of angelic powers, and (2) the inculcation of a ritual asceticism designed to free man from the burden of the flesh, and to bring him into conformity with angelic

spirituality. Man, according to this conception, was in subjection to angels whose authority over him was represented by legal enactments about meats and drinks. In opposition to this St. Paul declares that in Christ man has been redeemed from this real or fancied subjection by the death of the Cross, in which was involved not only the abolition of the Law, but also the dethronement of the angels which were its guardians and patrons. The passage with which we are now dealing must be compared with ii. 14, 15 if we are to extract its full and precise meaning. The Apostle has convinced himself that the victory of Christ on the Cross was in its effect equivalent to the subordination of angels to a power higher than themselves, a process which entailed the freedom of man from the bondage in which he had been previously held, and, working upon this conviction, he extends the reconciling function of Christ and gives it the widest possible scope. The idea of reconciliation plays a prominent part both in *Colossians* and *Ephesians*, but in the latter it is the reconciliation between Jew and Gentile in the unity of the Catholic Church that is mainly to the fore, whereas in our Epistle it is the reconciliation of a Universe out of harmony with God that is brought out. In ver. 20 the Apostle declares that Christ by His reconciling death potentially restored to the whole Universe, estranged from God by sin and ignorance, a harmony that was complete and perfect (cf. *ἀποκαταλλάξαι*, ver. 20, a double compound expressing the completeness of the action), and, if we take the phrase "whether things upon earth or things in heaven" as it seems meant to be taken, viz. as explanatory of *τὰ πάντα* which immediately precedes it, all spiritual beings, angels included, are brought within the range of the reconciliation effected in the death of the Cross. This declaration also receives additional force when we remember that these very spiritual beings themselves had, in the mind of the Colossian heretic, a share in this process of reconciliation. This extension of the scope of the reconciling function of Christ to cover the world

of spirits constitutes a real difficulty, because elsewhere the Apostle bases the reconciliation of man to God by the death of Christ on the common possession of σάρξ by man and the Incarnate Christ. In the words of the writer of *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, "For verily not of angels doth He take hold, but He taketh hold of the seed of Abraham," and how, then, could the reconciliation of the Cross be valid in the world of spirits? The explanation of St. Paul's somewhat peculiar standpoint is to be sought in that system of angelology which was prevalent in later Judaism, and, as we have seen, was taken over bodily by the Apostle, where a dualism was in vogue which regarded earthly conditions as only an image of corresponding conditions existing in the unseen world, so that angels were conceived as standing in the closest relation to men and as sharing a moral responsibility with them. Sin and suffering on the earth produced suffering in heaven, and, consequently, a reconciliation which in its effects should be logically confined to humanity was extended into the spiritual world. And, further, the doctrine of the Headship of Christ over the whole Universe involved His Headship over the angels, and the reconciliation effected through the Head covered all that was in subjection to Him as Head and, therefore, included the whole of creation, spiritual as well as material. The restoration of a complete harmony between God and His world, which was the purpose of God in the death of the Son, involved the destruction of the evil principle from which even the world of spirits was not immune, and angels as well as men were swept into the net of the universal reconciling function and power of the Crucified and Risen Christ, the sole Mediator between God and the Universe. There is perhaps some point in the inversion of the order in which the two elements, "heaven" and "earth," are mentioned in the process of reconciliation as compared with their order in the process of creation. In the former "things upon the earth" precede "things in the heavens" as being nearer to the reconciling Cross,

and so being the first to realise its influence, while the heavenly sphere is further removed from it.

i. 21–23. *The Reconciling Work of the Son in its Special Relation to the Colossian Church.*

From the consideration of the reconciling work of the Son in its general aspect the Apostle now turns to view that work as it affected the Colossian Christians in particular. He has placed Christ before them in the widest range of His reconciling activity, as restoring to the whole Universe, both on its material and spiritual sides, its original harmony with itself and with the Divine purpose, and he now proceeds to illustrate the practical application of his doctrine in relation to the Church to which his letter is addressed. Every Christian privilege that the Church of Colossæ enjoys, and every Christian hope which animates its soul as a corporate entity, is fundamentally associated with and dependent upon the reconciliation accomplished in and through Christ.

i. 21. Two expressions are used in this verse to define the pre-Christian condition of the Colossian converts.

(1) ἀπηλλοτριωμένους. It has been already suggested (p. 20) that the great majority of the Colossian Christians were converts from paganism, and this suggestion is confirmed by the employment of this particular participle to define their pre-Christian status. Although the term in the present context is ambiguous, what St. Paul meant to convey by it is made quite clear in Ephes. ii. 12, where the reference to Gentile Christians is unmistakable. But while ἀπηλλοτριωμένοι in *Ephesians* denotes only the estrangement of Gentiles from the commonwealth of Israel, it has here a much wider significance and implies estrangement from God. There is also a further implication in the term as it is used in this passage which is not found in the parallel passage in *Ephesians*. In the latter context it is difficult to

press the participial sense, because, strictly speaking, the Gentiles could not have been alienated from a society of which they had never been members, whereas in this verse the participle does suggest the thought that it was by their own action that the Gentiles had erected a barrier between themselves and God. This wilful and self-determined separation of the pagan world, as viewed by St. Paul, may be studied in that pregnant paragraph in Rom. i. 18–32, where the failure and guilt of that world before God are elaborated with convincing force.

(2) *ἐχθροὺς τῇ διανοίᾳ ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις τοῖς πονηροῖς.* The expression *ἐχθροὺς τῇ διανοίᾳ* has been translated in two ways: (1) "hostile to God in your mind," and (2) "hated by God because of your mind." Of the two the former is preferable, partly because it gives a sense to the expression which is more consonant with what is implied in *ἀπηλλοτριωμένους* with its glance at the wilful failure of the Gentiles to remain in harmony with God, and partly because the second translation seems to demand *διὰ* with the Accusative rather than the simple Dative. By *διάνοια* we are to understand the inner man which thinks, reflects, and wills, and what the Apostle describes here is a moral disposition which is hostile to God in its very foundation and gives expression to that hostility in deeds which are evil by their very nature.

i. 22. The reconciliation in which the Colossians too share under the present dispensation (*νυνί*) has been accomplished through the death of Christ in a human body (*ἐν τῷ σώματι τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ*), and its ultimate purpose is the presentation of themselves perfect in purity before the throne of God. There are two points in this verse that call for comment.

(1) What is the force of *τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ* in the phrase *ἐν τῷ σώματι τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ* where it seems to be redundant, seeing that *σῶμα* in this connection naturally conveys at the same time the idea of *σάρξ*? There may have been two reasons why the Apostle is

careful to define the crucified body of Christ as "the body of His flesh."

(i) The first reason consisted in his anxiety to discountenance a tendency that prevailed in the Colossian heresy, where a contempt for the flesh and an undue exaltation of spiritual beings and of their share in the process of reconciliation were rampant. St. Paul, therefore, stresses the historical fact that it was through the death of that very humanity which Christ possessed, and yet was held in such contempt by the heretics, that man was reconciled to God, and not through the spiritual beings that they regarded with such reverence and esteem.

(ii) He had also perhaps a practical purpose in view. He is dealing with the standing of the Colossian Christians before God, and he would remind them that there is a mystical correspondence between their experiences and those of Christ. He died in "the body of His flesh," and they too have a death to die, which consists in the crucifying of the body of flesh with all its carnal and sinful tendencies. We may compare with this verse ii. 11, where the identical expression *σῶμα τῆς σαρκὸς* is used in reference to this very thought. It is hardly possible that at this early stage the emphasis on "the body of flesh" is meant to be a protest against Docetic views of the human body of Christ.

(2) When does the presentation before God implied in *παραστῆσαι* take place? Is it a present and continuous process, or does it look to the final presentation at the Day of Judgment? A comparison with St. Paul's language elsewhere is not decisive because Ephes. i. 4, *εἶναι ἡμᾶς ἁγίους, καὶ ἀμώμους κατενώπιον αὐτοῦ ἐν ἀγάπῃ*, points to the former alternative, while Ephes. v. 27 *ἵνα παραστήσῃ αὐτὸς ἑαυτῷ ἔνδοξον τὴν ἐκκλησίαν*, seems to require a reference to the final presentation. It is probably unnecessary to take a narrow view of what was in the Apostle's mind when he spoke of this "presentation," and we are completely justified in finding in the whole phrase indications of a wide vision

in which he beheld the whole sequence, the reconciliation, justification, and sanctification of the Christian now and throughout the whole of time, issuing in what was the ultimate purpose of God in Christ, the presentation to Himself of an all-glorious Church, without spot or wrinkle at the last great Day.

i. 23. The accomplishment of God's purpose for the Colossians was, however, dependent upon one stringent condition, their steadfast adherence to the Gospel they had received. There is probably an indirect allusion here to the temptation that assailed them from the side of the heresy, with its claim that Pauline Christianity was good enough as far as it went, but that it needed to be supplemented in theory by the doctrine of angels, and in practice by the exercise of asceticism. St. Paul, therefore, insists that the very salvation of the Colossians was bound up with the truest and firmest hold on the faith that had been taught them, and he urges in support of his contention his own personal authority which stands behind the Gospel that had been preached to them by Epaphras.

Τεθεμελιωμένοι καὶ ἑδραῖοι καὶ μὴ μετακινούμενοι ἀπὸ τῆς ἐλπίδος τοῦ εὐαγγελίου. The need of stedfastness is impressed upon the Colossian Church by the heaping up on one another of three emphatic terms, the first expressing a solid foundation, the second the stability of the building erected upon that foundation, while the third, in which there is a change of Tense from the Perfect to the Present intimating that the process implied is continuous, is an injunction to resist all attempts on the part of any force or power from the outside to move them from the foundation on which they had been planted, that foundation being here represented as " the hope of the Gospel." It is possible that in the third term there is a change of metaphor, and that the Apostle is here thinking not of a building, but of a ship, as in Ephes. iv. 14, " tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine," and that the " hope of the Gospel " is conceived as an anchor as in Heb. vi. 19.

ἐν πάσῃ κτίσει. Here the Apostle is glancing back at ver. 15, where the same expression is found signifying the supremacy of Christ in creation. The universality of the Gospel corresponds to the universal supremacy of the Son, except that the preaching of the Gospel is of necessity confined to the creation under heaven. In scope the range of the Gospel is commensurate with that enjoined in St. Mark xvi. 15, but the definite article before κτίσει is lacking here. The lesson underlying the sentence is that the universality and comprehensiveness of the Gospel are also the guarantee of its truth.

III. The Value of St. Paul's Teaching for the Present Age.

It may now be pertinent to ask what value the teaching of St. Paul, as it is represented in this Epistle, has for us in our day. The belief in angels and its corollary, the trust in spiritual mediators, against which the Apostle's polemic was mainly directed, have very largely, if not entirely, lost their meaning for us, but the fundamental problems with which he was grappling are still with us, although they may find expression in formulæ that differ widely from those current among the Colossian heretics. The existence of evil and suffering in the world is still a difficulty that has to be reckoned with, and we are living in a world in which there seems to exist an antinomy between God and nature calling loudly for a process of reconciliation. It is a moot point whether the doctrine of evolution, when it is put forward as a principle working in nature through a selfish and ruthless struggle and so sanctioning and perpetuating cruelty and wrong, has not removed God further away than ever from His world, and whether in its practical issue it has not led men, who are prepared to accept Christ as the Lord of their inner life, the Saviour of the soul, and the Head of the Church, to exclude Him from His functions in the rule and government of nature in its manifold

operations. Nature, we are told, proceeds on its course governed by forces which science can explain, but which have no relation to the God of faith, the God of love and righteousness Who is revealed in Christ. What the modern world has largely achieved is the replacing of the angelic mediators of the Colossian heresy by the "laws of nature," and the refusal to Christ of His supremacy as the Head of the Universe, so that the parallel between the mood which prevails in our own day and that which underlay the old-time perversion at Colossæ is closer than we might have imagined. We also, like the Colossian heretic, give Christ a place in the world and allot to Him a part in the life of man, but we exclude from His purview and authority nature and its forces, which, in the minds of many, acknowledge no rule and are subject to no guiding hand.

In opposition to this tendency, so prevalent in every age in one form or another, to separate God from His world and to withhold from Christ His due function in the Universe and in every department of life, St. Paul proclaims unhesitatingly the universal supremacy of Christ and the subordination to Him of "all principalities and powers," whether conceived, as in his day, as spiritual mediators, or, in our own, as the laws of nature, and declares that, in the realm of nature as well as in the realm of grace, all life and all power are mediated through Christ and are subject to His supreme will. He claims for Christ the control of life in all its manifold departments and in every sphere, visible or invisible, and places in His hands the government of the world and the direction of every power that makes for the progress of humanity.

And this supremacy that he claims for Christ is a supremacy rooted in love, in the love of God as manifested in Christ. It is a love which reaches to the uttermost; a reconciling love through which even powers that are hostile to man are made to work out man's perfection; a love that brings to those who have fellowship with Christ victory over every ill that arises out of

the physical scheme of things and leads them to the perfect life. *The Epistle to the Colossians* is, therefore, a lasting testimony to the existence of a power supreme over every force, good or evil, spiritual or material, whether working in nature or in man, and to the truth of the sovereignty of Christ over every influence, whether it retards or advances the spiritual and moral progress of man. Its keynote is the proclamation that the dominion of Christ is as wide as the Universe, and that His truimphant love embraces with its arms every creation of God.[1]

[1] See Somerville, *St. Paul's Conception of Christ*, pp. 173–176.

CHAPTER IV

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

I. Asceticism and its Failure.

The controversial element in the Epistle comes to an end with the closing verses of chapter ii. and the opening verses of chapter iii. (1–4) form the bridge by means of which the Apostle passes from his mordant criticism of the heretical system to a constructive exposition of the Christian life in its practical aspect. There is, strictly speaking, no polemic in the latter half of the Epistle, if we except one or two side glances at certain factors in the heresy, such as the emphasis on the absolute spiritual equality of all Christians in iii. 11, as opposed to the claims put forward on behalf of the privileged few in virtue of their assumed monopoly of esoteric wisdom. The polemical section closes with a stern condemnation of the asceticism which was inculcated by the heretics. This disparagement is based on two grounds: (1) it is wrong in principle, and (2) it is ineffective and does not accomplish what is claimed for it.

Asceticism in principle arose out of a belief, which was perhaps not so clearly formulated in St. Paul's time as it was later in the great Gnostic systems of the second century, but was certainly in the air at the earlier period, that matter was essentially evil and that true spirituality could only be attained by a rigorous suppression of the material element in man. To reach purity and spiritual perfection it was, therefore, necessary to fence oneself about with a code of ritual and sumptuary prohibitions;

to reduce life to a ceaseless conflict with physical conditions and dangers, and to make of it one long-continued and elaborate round of asceticism. To counter this dualism, this essential separation of matter and spirit, St. Paul lays down the proposition that it is based on an absolutely false ideal, that it aims at a spirituality that is unreal, and that in its effect it does not produce a purified and sanctified human nature. Perfection, according to St. Paul, is not reached by avoiding contact with the material world and all that it connotes, but by claiming that world and every human interest for Christ, because the whole Universe, whether in its material or spiritual aspect, is His by creation, His in its government and direction, and His, because He has reconciled it to God in every department of its being. As a matter of practical religion he also declares that asceticism must end in complete failure (ii. 23). The heretics have an entirely wrong conception of sin and its working, and the remedy they propose must, consequently, be hopelessly ineffective. Sin does not abide in the material world as such, but in the heart of man, and the dominion of sin will not be abolished by codes of prohibitory regulations, but by some power which can touch the springs of human nature and will create character. And, further, asceticism keeps the man who is absorbed in its exercise on a deplorably low level of spirituality, because, in essence, it belongs to the sphere of σάρξ, and is lacking in that force which alone can exalt man to the serene heights, where the Spirit reigns and peace dwells. Engrossed in the contemplation of σάρξ, and the evils it brings in its train, humanity is weighted down and never rises above the element which clogs every upward movement (ii. 20–23).

In iii. 1–4 the Apostle shows the better way to the attainment of freedom from the flesh and its shackles. It consists in the transference of thought and action from the realms of σάρξ, with its asceticism and prohibitions, into a higher sphere; in a change from earth

to heaven, and in the adoption of a new principle of life which can accomplish what asceticism fails to achieve, and will satisfy every spiritual craving, meet every human emergency, and prove victorious over evil in every form. The heretics hoped to attain to spiritual freedom by means of an asceticism which would bring them into contact with the angelic denizens of the spiritual world, but St. Paul points to the one and only road that leads to the conquest of sin and evil, viz. the union of the Christian with Christ in His death and resurrection, a union that belongs fundamentally to the region of the spiritual and eternal, and exalts man to the very heights of heaven.

II. The Mysticism of St. Paul.

The union between Christ and the Christian, postulated by the Apostle at this point, introduces an element in his thought which has attracted considerable attention among writers who in recent years have dealt with St. Paul and his teaching. I refer to what is now generally designated "the mysticism of St. Paul." There are wide tracts of the Apostle's teaching in which he speaks of the union existing between Christ and Himself and, *pari passu*, between Christ and believers generally, in terms which seem to transcend a merely personal and ethical relationship. His language in this connection reaches its culminating point in the startling declaration in Gal. ii. 20, "I live; and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me," but profusely scattered over all the Epistles are expressions which lead up to the conviction so explicitly set forth in the foregoing citation. Among these are phrases which represent the Christian as being "in Christ" (2 Cor. v. 17; xii. 2), as having "put on Christ" (Rom. xiii. 14; Gal. iii. 27), and others which speak of Christ as being in the Christian (2 Cor. xiii. 5; Gal. ii. 20; Phil. i. 21).

This indwelling of Christ in the Christian is also frequently identified with the indwelling of the Spirit, and in this sense "Christ" and "the Spirit" are often interchangeable terms. And, further, the union of the believer with Christ is more closely defined in some passages as implying fellowship with Him in His death and resurrection (Rom. vi. 1–9; 1 Cor. iv. 8 ff.; Phil. iii. 10; Col. iii. 3, 4). It is this fellowship with the Passion, Resurrection, and Exaltation of Christ, which implies that the victory achieved over sin in the flesh by the Redeemer and His resurrection to a new and exalted life are also reproduced in the believer, that is most typical of St. Paul. This conviction of the absolute oneness of the Christian with the deepest experiences of Christ and with their accomplished results arose undoubtedly out of his own experience in Christ. A very superficial acquaintance with the Epistles suffices to show that the Apostle's thought of Christ circled round the great historical acts of redemption—the death, burial, and resurrection. It was in consequence of this particular outlook upon the achievements of Christ that, when he became conscious of the vital transformation in his own religious life and thinking which followed his conversion, he came to associate certain definite stages in his spiritual development with these culminating acts in the story of redemption, and to see in his own life something corresponding to the death and resurrection of Christ. The symbolism of Baptism (although, as we shall see later, Baptism meant to him considerably more than a mere symbol) helped on this process. The plunge of the catechumen beneath the waters became a death with Christ, the pause while he was still immersed a burial with Christ, and the standing erect once more, clear of the waters and in the air and sunlight, became a veritable resurrection with Christ.[1]

But the character and tone of the Apostle's language

[1] Sanday and Headlam, *Romans*, pp. 162, 163.

when he touches upon the identification of himself with Christ and His experiences seem to cover more than a mere ethical change, and to involve considerably more than the renunciation of sin and the adoption of a new righteousness. When he says, "I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live; and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me," he is using the language of mysticism and is now speaking of a mode of existence in which his own personality and will have vanished to such a degree that their place has been practically usurped by the all-controlling power of the indwelling Christ. He has become so closely identified with Christ that he feels as if he no longer has a soul of his own, and all his aspirations and endeavours give him the impression of not being the product of his own spiritual endowment, but to be derived from the Spirit of Christ which has taken complete possession of his being. The union between Christ and the believer, for the Apostle unhesitatingly credits his brethren with what he claims for himself in this matter, is, therefore, a mystical union, transcending thought, a union in which at its most exalted moment all personal and moral relations are lost in the enraptured consciousness of the most intimate contact with and absorption in Christ. And yet the mysticism of St. Paul is essentially a sane mysticism. There is no trace in him of the contempt for the historical facts of Christianity, or of the disparagement of the forms and ceremonies of institutional religion which are so characteristic of the extreme Christian mystic in all ages. However intimate he may conceive his spiritual identity with Christ to have been he never loses the sense of his own individuality, and in the very verse in which his mystical language reaches its climax, viz. Gal. ii. 20, he interprets the union with Christ as worked out in his individual bodily life and as essentially related to faith. "That life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God." St. Paul's mysticism does not reach further than the recognition

of the fact that his religion took its rise in an inward experience of Christ, and that every spiritual movement of his own soul was the outcome of the indwelling of Christ in himself.

III. The Sacramental Teaching of St. Paul.

A further question of considerable importance and interest arises from a study of the opening verses of chapter iii. In ver. 2, where St. Paul states, "Ye died and your life is hid with Christ in God," he is clearly looking back to the corresponding statement in ii. 12, "having been buried with Him in baptism, wherein ye were also raised through faith in the working of God who raised Him from the dead." It would appear from these two passages and from certain explicit references in other Epistles, as, *e.g.* Rom. vi. 3–5, that the Apostle associated the mystical fellowship of the Christian with the death and resurrection of Christ very definitely with the ordinance of Baptism. It is, therefore, natural to ask what was the precise part played by Baptism in this process of regeneration and union with Christ, as it was conceived in St. Paul's mind. Was it a mere outward symbol of an inward movement with which it had no vital connection, or were the outward rite and the inward spiritual movement inseparably and fundamentally associated with each other as cause and effect? Now this is a question which brings us within the range of a very wide and important controversy. The cleavage between Catholic and Protestant thought has been mainly caused by a divergence of views concerning the nature of the Christian Sacraments: the Catholic regarding them as veritable and actual channels of grace, while Protestants generally, although there are important exceptions, view the Sacraments as mere symbols of a process which is in essence independent of them. As we are only concerned in this Epistle with

Baptism, we shall confine ourselves to a discussion of the character of St. Paul's teaching concerning that ordinance.

We shall do well to bear in mind that English-speaking Protestantism has for centuries taken for granted that the Apostle never assigned to Baptism anything more than a symbolical significance, and that no argument need be produced to support that supposition. "How," it was asked, "could the great protagonist in the crucial controversy concerning faith and works ever attach any vital worth to an outward ceremony like Baptism?" Protestantism as a whole was perfectly satisfied with the validity of this claim, with the result that no real effort was made to get at the Apostle's mind on the point. There has arisen recently, however, a very striking modification in the attitude of some Protestants of standing and authority towards the sacramental teaching of St. Paul, an illustration of which is furnished by a most illuminating article contributed by Prof. H. T. Andrews, then of Aberdeen, to the *Expositor*,[1] in which he unhesitatingly declares St. Paul to have been a convinced sacramentalist and to have taught in the clearest manner the doctrine of Baptismal Regeneration. The article is so well thought out and so lucid in its expression that I make no apology for reproducing its main arguments.

The usual Protestant view of St. Paul's doctrine of Baptism is based, as I have stated above, on the general character of his teaching, and more particularly on the vital importance attached by him to faith as the fundamental factor in the Christian life. This alone, we are told, is sufficient warrant that the Apostle never was and never could be a Sacramentalist. But in the matter of Baptism it was further urged that the comparative rarity of allusions to it in the Epistles and the positive statement that he himself did not baptize

[1] *Expositor*, Series viii, Vol. 12, pp. 353 ff.

(1 Cor. 1. 14–17), prove that he did not regard Baptism as fundamental. If and where he does seem to associate a very real function with Baptism, as in the notable passage in Rom. vi. 3–5, it was only due to a strain of poetry in the Apostle's temperament. To these points Dr. Andrews makes the following reply.

1. The importance of any particular subject in the Apostle's mind cannot be estimated by the amount of space devoted to it in his writings. Some of the most fundamental factors in Christian life and doctrine are barely mentioned by him, for the simple reason that there was no controversy concerning them, and Baptism apparently belonged to this category.

2. There were special conditions prevailing at Corinth, and more particularly the sectarianism which the Apostle so sternly condemns, which made it inexpedient that he should personally baptize.

3. It is a pure assumption to assert that a phrase like "all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death" is merely a poetical expression.

He grants that there is some force in the argument based on the general trend of St. Paul's doctrinal teaching, but he would have us remember that in the crystal of Paulinism there are three facets, the juridical, the mystical, and the sacramental, and that while we may find it difficult to harmonise them, the Apostle himself was probably encumbered by no such difficulty. Sound scholarship, he tells us, can only arrive at a true estimate of what St. Paul really taught by an honest and unbiassed study of the crucial passages in which the Apostle is concerned with that ordinance.

The conclusions which Dr. Andrews draws from the examination of these passages may be summarised as follows :—

1. In 1 Cor. vi. 11, "Ye were washed, ye were sanctified, ye were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ," with which a passage in St. Paul's speech on

the stairs of the Temple, "Arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins" (Acts. xxii. 16) may be compared, there is a very real and definite *nexus* postulated between Baptism and the forgiveness of sins.

2. In 1 Cor. xv. 29, where St. Paul speaks of "baptism for the dead," an expression of which there are thirty-six different interpretations current, thirty-five of which are ingenious attempts to pervert the clear sense of a perfectly unambiguous Greek phrase, the Apostle is unquestionably referring to the practice of vicarious baptism of living Christians on behalf of those who had died in an unbaptized condition, and, if Baptism was merely a symbol, how are we to explain the origin of a custom which must have been founded on the conviction that it did confer some spiritual endowment that could not be obtained in any other way?

3. In Ephes. iv. 4–6, "one body, one spirit, one Lord, one faith, *one baptism*, one God and Father of all," Baptism is assigned a place in the great hierarchy of spiritual realities, and why, if it is a symbol and nothing more? Then again in Ephes. v. 26, where we read, "that He might sanctify the Church, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the word," there is a perfectly definite and categorical statement of the regenerating function of Baptism, which is confirmed by a further statement in Titus iii. 5, "He saved us through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost."

4. There are some phrases used by St. Paul in reference to Baptism which are neutral and are in themselves capable of being interpreted in a sacramental or non-sacramental sense, such as "baptized into Christ" or "baptized into one body," but it is both sound and scientific to explain the unknown by means of the known, and the Apostle's doctrine of Baptism is so unquestionably sacramental in the passages previously quoted that we have no option but to take the neutral expressions in the same sense. And, further, in the matter of Baptis-

mal Regeneration, which was clearly taught by St. Paul, he is in complete agreement with other New Testament writings, as, *e.g.* St. Mark. xvi. 16, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," 1 St. Peter iii. 21, "which also after a true likeness doth save you, even baptism," and St. John iii. 5, "except a man be born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God," in which the New Testament teaching concerning Baptism reaches its most advanced development and where it is unequivocally asserted that it is essential not only to the *bene esse*, but also to the very *esse* of the Christian life.

5. We are also led to the same conclusion by a consideration of the functions assigned to Baptism in the Pauline Epistles. It plays a vital part in all the initial stages of Christian experience. It cleanses from the defilement of sin (1 Cor. vi. 11; Ephes. v. 26); it creates the mystical union between Christ and the Christian (Rom. vi. 3; Gal. iii. 27; Col. ii. 12), and is the instrument by means of which the believer is incorporated into the Church as the Body of Christ (1 Cor. xii. 13).

I find myself in complete agreement with Dr. Andrews' deductions up to this point, and am firmly convinced that St. Paul was a Sacramentalist in the truest sense of the term, and that he conceived Baptism as conveying to the Christian a grace which was not normally bestowed upon him in any other way, but I part company with him when he seeks to find the source of St. Paul's sacramental teaching in the Mystery Religions and their so-called sacramental rites. The question at issue is far too wide for us to enter upon here, and I shall only suggest that the vital importance attached to the Christian Sacraments by the Apostle needs no other foundation than his Jewish training, the teaching of Christ, and the doctrine and practice of the primitive Christian community.

IV. The New Life in Christ, iii. 1–4.

We have seen that St. Paul's method of dealing with the asceticism that was rampant in the Colossian heresy was to substitute a principle of life for a code of prohibitory regulations, a principle which raised the Christian believer high above the sphere of σάρξ, and placed him upon a lofty plane of spiritual existence. According to the Apostle, the Christian man is admitted into a humanity which already has Christ in it, and has become a different humanity because Christ is in it. He is now a member of a race which has Christ as its Head, and possesses a nature that has been redeemed by Christ. In this humanity redeemed by Christ there is a natural ground already prepared for the development of the individual Christian, both in his personal capacity and as a member of the mystical Body of Christ, the Church. Of this regeneration potentially wrought in Christ Baptism has become in the Church the sign and the seal. It is in this truth of humanity redeemed in Christ and continuously inspired by His presence within it, that St. Paul finds the source of all Christian morality and of the ethical development of the Church.[1] The admission of man into this redeemed and inspired humanity is by him definitely associated with Baptism, which involves a mystical fellowship with the deepest experiences of Christ, with His death, resurrection, and ascension, and translates him from the sphere of the material into that of the spiritual, or, as St. Paul puts it, from earth to heaven (iii. 1, 2). And this transference is not confined to man's spiritual self, for it implies also an intellectual revulsion; his point of view is changed and his standard of judgment revolutionised. The Christian is "to seek heaven and to think heaven." In every department of his being he now belongs to the eternal and the invisible. The power which exalted

[1] Newman Smyth, *Christian Ethics*, p. 233 f.

Christ to the throne of God has also exalted the Christian to God's right hand. Lifted high above the world and seated in the heavenly places he is now beyond the control of the world-powers which rule here below, and dwells where Christ alone holds sway. As belonging to the sphere of the eternal and the invisible the present life of the baptized Christian is *a hidden life*. Here again we may perhaps observe the influence upon the mind of the Apostle of the symbolism of Baptism, where the sinking under the waters pre-figures the disappearance of the Christian to the world. The new life is a life of which the world can know nothing, and consequently can itself know nothing of the world. But it is not to remain hidden: it will be revealed in all its glorious reality at the Second Coming of Christ, because of the Christian's intimate fellowship with Christ, and because Christ Himself is his very life. The manifestation of the Redeemer, consequently, includes the manifestation of those who are His, and this by its very nature must be a manifestation in glory (iii. 3, 4).

V. The Christian Life in its General Aspect, iii. 5–18.

Having laid a sound and sure foundation for the new life in the fellowship of the Christian in the death and resurrection of Christ, the Apostle proceeds to set forth in detail how that life is to be worked out in the world, enjoining what vices he is to shun and what virtues to cultivate.

(i.) *The "old" and the "new" Man.*

The keynote to the exposition will be found in vv. 9, 10, in the emphasis on "the putting off of the *old man* with his doings and the putting on of the *new man*," so that it is necessary to understand what St. Paul means by

these two entities if we are to arrive at a right conception of what the Christian life connotes for him.

The English word "new" is represented in Greek by two words, *νέος* and *καινός*, the former of which implies "newness" in point of time, and is frequently translated "young"; whereas *καινός* connotes the idea of quality as well as that of youth, and is equivalent to our word "fresh." It is *νέος* that is used in this passage, but the supplementary meaning contained in *καινὸς* is supplied in the participle which follows, *ἀνακαινούμενον* (= which is ever being freshly renewed). In the description of the new man who is described as renewed unto knowledge, *κατ' εἰκόνα τοῦ κτίσαντος αὐτόν* (ver. 10), there is a backward glance at Gen. i. 26, "Let us make man in our image"; but it is with a new creation that the Apostle is concerned here, the creation of the spiritual man in Christ, although the new follows the analogy of the old in being a creation after God's own image. The figures of the *old* and *new man* have been already employed in Rom. vi. 6; 2 Cor. v. 17, and Gal. vi. 15, but curiously enough the two are never found together in the earlier Epistles. By combining together all the relevant passages we are able to arrive at an approximate idea of what the figures conveyed to St. Paul's mind. In Rom. vi. 6, the *old* man is declared to have been "crucified with Christ," and this process is again definitely related to Baptism. In Gal. ii. 20, the Apostle states that he himself has been "crucified with Christ," but is living because Christ lives in him. The following, then, would seem to be the trend of his thoughts on this matter.

"At your baptism you were united with Christ in His death, you were buried with Him. The former *you* died. You were the slave of sin, living in a body dominated by sin, but the man who lived that life died. He was crucified with Christ. I myself was crucified with Christ, and yet I am living because Christ is living in me. I am become a *new* man, with a new principle

of life operating in me, and the life that I now live is a life upon which Christ alone has any claim. You Colossians also admitted His claim upon you in your baptism. You are no longer yourselves, another came to live in you. Bring your lives, therefore, into correspondence with your true position. You have done this potentially in your baptism. Complete and perfect the process by a fresh act of will which shall realise your baptismal standing." [1]

The metaphor that St. Paul employs in these verses (9, 10), viz. *the stripping off* of the "old man" and the *clothing of themselves* with the "new," is a favourite of his, and is found elsewhere in Rom. xiii. 14, Gal. iii. 27, and Ephes. iv. 24, but the precise Greek words which denote the "stripping off," the verb ἀπεκδύομαι and the corresponding noun ἀπέκδυσις, are only found in this Epistle, and are apparently words of the Apostle's own coinage, as no other instances of the noun have been discovered, and only one other of the verb, viz. in Josephus, *Ant.* vi. 14, 2, a later production than the Pauline Epistles. The simpler form ἐκδύομαι occurs in 2 Cor. v. 4.

(ii.) *The Vices of the "old man,"* iii. 5–9.

St. Paul seems to divide the vices which characterize unredeemed humanity into two categories.

1. Those which endanger *the individual life* of the Christian (iii. 5). In this category he places πορνεία, ἀκαθαρσία, πάθος, ἐπιθυμία κακή, and πλεονεξία, all of which are vices having their root in lust and shameless rapacity. πορνεία is a particular form of the more general ἀκαθαρσία, while πάθος extends the reference in ἀκαθαρσία and includes passions not connected with sexual lust, such as drunkenness and gluttony.

ἐπιθυμία is used in the papyri in the widest sense

[1] See Robinson's, *Ephesians*, p. 108.

of "desire," and also in the sexual sense of a forsaken husband's desire for his wife. It is here accompanied by the epithet *κακή*, because it is in itself not necessarily an evil thing. The expression *ἐπιθυμία κακή* is probably comprehensive, and includes all evil *longings*, as contrasted with ungovernable affections.

πλεονεξία is here equated with "idolatry," because in so many men avarice becomes a religion, and their riches usurp God's place as the object of worship. It is perhaps closely connected with sexual lust in this enumeration, because money often provides the means of indulging sinful propensities.

2. Vices which endanger *the corporate life* of the Church (iii. 8, 9). *ὀργή, θυμός, κακία, βλασφημία, αἰσχρολογία ἐκ τοῦ στόματος, ψεῦδος.* These are in every case qualities which militate against the spirit of fellowship that should rule in the Church, and tend to disturb its peace. The first three perhaps define the mood, while the last three point to the outcome of the mood when it finds expression in human speech. If there is any substantial difference between *ὀργὴ* and *θυμός*, it may be that the former stands for a settled and sullen angry temperament, and the latter for a sudden and passionate outburst of anger. This sense of *θυμός* as an explosion of wrath is frequent in the papyri. In a first-century document a thief who has stolen a garment is threatened as follows by the owner thereof: *θυμοῦ περιπεσεῖται* (= he shall have a warm reception).

κακία is a malicious disposition which finds pleasure in doing injury to one's neighbour, a meaning that is illustrated by the following extract from a papyrus dated 141 B.C.: *διὰ πάσης ἡσυχίας εἶχον τῶι μηδεμίαν ἔννοιαν κακίας ἔχειν*, "I remained perfectly calm without the least suspicion that he sought to do me an injury."

Βλασφημία is here used in its original sense of "scurrilous language," and not in the sense of irreverence towards God which it acquired later, as, *e. g.* in St. James ii. 7; 2 St. Peter ii. 10. The right attitude towards God

is not in question in this list, and every sin enumerated is a social and not a religious sin.

αἰσχρολογία ἐκ τοῦ στόματος. In Ephes. v. 3, this vice is represented by three separate words, *αἰσχρότης, μωρολογία, εὐτραπελία,* which are here collected and placed under one simple heading, of which the following is a fairly accurate paraphrase: "Nothing foul, nothing foolish must pass your lips." This vice differs from *βλασφημία* as foul and filthy language differs from abusive language. In *Didache* iii. 3, the Christian is counselled, *μηδὲ αἰσχρολόγος μηδὲ ὑψηλόφθαλμος,* "Be neither filthy of tongue nor cast lewd eyes."

iii. 9, *μὴ ψεύδεσθε εἰς ἀλλήλους.* Lying was congenial to the Greek and to his Oriental neighbour, and there is little reason to believe that either the modern Greek or Levantine has improved in this respect upon his ancestor of St. Paul's day.

(iii.) *The Catholicity of the Church,* iii. 11.

The thought of the evil tempers and the lying which still survived in spite of their new religion among the members of the Church of Colossæ, and the existence of dispositions so utterly opposed to the brotherly love and the spirit of fellowship that were involved in their very profession of Christianity and so inimical to the unity of the Christian body, leads the Apostle to stress the Catholicity of the Church, and to remind the Colossians how Christianity by its very comprehensiveness has abolished every distinction created in times past by differences of nationality, religion, culture, and social status. If in the Catholic Church the Greek and the Jew, the Greek and the barbarian, as represented even by the rude and uncivilised Scythian, the slave-owner and the slave, were admitted on terms of complete spiritual equality and were meant to live side by side in peace and quietness, it was surely a small matter to demand that the members of a single Christian com-

munity should cultivate the sense of brotherhood and banish every mood that threatened to mar that happy fellowship which should be the distinctive mark of a Christian congregation. There should be no room for jealousy or sectionalism where "Christ was all in all." If among the Colossian heretics there was a privileged class which claimed a monopoly of illumination and wisdom, it was not so in the flock of Christ. There Christ Himself was the possession of every soul that believed and trusted in Him.

In Gal. iii. 28, Christianity is described as cancelling the three great distinctions that kept the old world apart, religion (Jew and Gentile), social condition (bond and free), and sex (male and female); but in this Epistle the cleavage caused by different planes of culture takes the place of that caused by difference of sex, and it is on the abolition of this distinction that the deepest emphasis is laid here. It may be that the contempt of the Greek for every race but his own, on the score of his superior knowledge and culture, was working havoc at Colossæ, and that it was this that led the Apostle to declare that in the Christian Church the barbarian, nay even the Scythian, the most savage and most uncultured of barbarians, stood on terms of perfect equality with the most learned and philosophical Greek. The Church of Christ is the one sphere in which the best educated and most polished thinker occupies no pride of place as compared with his ignorant and unlearned brother, who has cultivated the humbler virtues that are inherent in the religion of Christ.

δοῦλος, ἐλεύθερος. St. Paul was particularly concerned at the moment about the relations of the Christian slave-owner to the Christian slave, because at this very time his mind was seriously occupied with the case of Onesimus, the runaway slave who was now being restored to the custody of his master, Philemon, and this may have been the reason why he included this antithesis as one of the factors in social life which had

been revolutionised by the inherent principles of the Christian faith.

(iv.) *The Virtues of the "new man,"* iii. 12–17.

The Apostle prefaces his appeal that the Colossians should exhibit in their individual and corporate lives the virtues of the man re-created in Christ, with an impassioned emphasis upon the position of privilege which was theirs as "God's elect, holy, and beloved." Christians are the "New Israel" of God, a chosen people, a consecrated race, God's own in a sense far transcending the relation that existed between Jehovah and Israel of old, and the very thought of their unique position should act as a stimulus to a life lived on a higher plane of morality and social sympathy and activity.

The virtues of the new life set forth here are of a social type, those qualities and dispositions which tend to produce unity and peace in the Church, and, as we might naturally expect, they are in most instances the exact opposites of the vices which have been condemned earlier in the chapter as being utterly unworthy and subversive of the Christian spirit of fellowship.

iii. 12. *σπλάγχνα οἰκτιρμοῦ, χρηστότης.* The difference between these two terms may perhaps consist in the latter having a wider range than the former, *σπλάγχνα οἰκτιρμοῦ* representing kindness where there is manifest room for pity, and *χρηστότης* standing for a sweetness of disposition consistently maintained.

ταπεινοφροσύνη. This word is for some obscure reason translated by the Revisers by three English equivalents, "humility" (as here), "lowliness" (Ephes. iv. 2), and "lowliness of mind" (Phil. ii. 3), whereas "humility" would have made excellent sense in all three cases.

ταπεινοφροσύνη is essentially a Christian term, and stands for an essentially Christian virtue. It is not found in the LXX, and in the few instances where it

occurs in profane literature, as, *e. g.* in Josephus, *B. J.* xlix. 2, Epictetus, *Diss.* iii. 24, 25, it is used in a depreciatory sense and connotes pusillanimity and abjectness. The disposition it indicates was absolutely alien to the convert from paganism. To the Greek humility was little else than a vice of nature, denoting weakness and meanspiritedness, the temper of the slave, and as such utterly inconsistent with self-respect and fulness of life. For St. Paul, however, it was the one specific virtue and quality which above all others marked the character of Christ, our Saviour, "who humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death." It was the special creation of Christ Himself, and it was He who brought the new spirit, of which *ταπεινοφροσύνη* is the outward manifestation, into the world, illustrating it in His own Person and action because "He was meek and lowly of heart." In the mind of Christ and of His Apostle it is a life of service and self-abnegation that is the "full life" and the highest revelation of the real power of the Christian.

πραότης, μακροθυμία. We shall best understand the specific meaning of these two terms if we think of their opposites. The opposite of *πραότης* is *βλασφημία*, rudeness, scurrilousness, and of *μακροθυμία, κακία*, the resentment which prompts to revenge and injury. *πραότης* is, therefore, the endurance of injury without loudly expressed protest or abuse, and *μακροθυμία* the endurance of injury without thought of revenge. Theophylact, however, explains the difference between the two terms as follows: "*πραότης* does not get angry soon, *μακροθυμία* does not get angry at all."

ἀνεχόμενοι ἀλλήλων καὶ χαριζόμενοι ἑαυτοῖς. These two expressions connoting "forbearing and forgiving" are a further extension of *πραότης* and *μακροθυμία*, and denote these virtues in action. We should note the change of pronouns in this passage, *ἑαυτοῖς* being substituted for *ἀλλήλοις* in the second limb. The modification may be due to a simple desire to change

as in St. Luke xxiii. 12, "Herod and Pilate became friends '*μετ' ἀλλήλων*,' for before they were at enmity '*πρὸς ἑαυτούς*,'" where, as here, *ἑαυτῶν* takes the place of *ἄλληλοι* in the second clause. But it is also possible that the Apostle is looking forward to the next sentence "even as the Lord forgave you, so also do ye," and that he emphasises their own forgiveness by Christ in order to enforce their forgiveness of one another, "You among yourselves must do *for yourselves* what Christ has done for you."

iii. 14. In this verse there is a reversion to the metaphor of clothing which has been already introduced in vv. 9, 10. It is the exercise of the quality of love that the Apostle now pleads for, a quality which is conceived (*ἐπὶ πᾶσι τούτοις*) either as the *outer garment* which keeps every other part of the clothing in its right place, or perhaps as the *girdle* which holds the flowing robes in position. Its function, in either case, is to convert the attire into a well-ordered and harmonious whole.

σύνδεσμος τῆς τελειότητος. The exact significance of this phrase has been much disputed. Love as the *σύνδεσμος* may denote (1) the bond which holds together the Christian graces and so creates perfection, or (2) the bond which holds all Christians together and by so doing leads to the ideal of Christian perfection, which is best realised in a complete Christian unity. On the whole the second interpretation is preferable, as giving the most natural explanation of the function of love, viz. the promotion of unity in the Church, and as being in closer accord with the thought expressed in the next verse, "to the which also ye were called *in one body*," where this unity is evidently uppermost in the Apostle's mind.

iii. 15. *ἡ εἰρήνη τοῦ Χριστοῦ βραβευέτω.* Here again, as we have seen, it is the unity of the Church that is mainly in view. The Church is one by its very nature and ideal, and Christians must, therefore, seek to trans-

late that ideal into a reality by cultivating peace among themselves. As a rule "peace" is represented by St. Paul as the gift of the Father, but it is "the peace of Christ" that is to rule in the Colossian Church. There is only one other passage in the Pauline Epistles outside of *Colossians* and *Ephesians* where "peace" is associated with the Son, 2 Thess. iii. 16, where Christ is designated "the Lord of peace," and this explains why in many MSS. Θεοῦ or the neutral Κυρίου has been substituted for Χριστοῦ in this context. The thought here may be compared with that in St. John xiv. 27, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you." It is the peace which Christ *gives*, and it is associated with the Son, and not with the Father, in this Epistle, because it is the function and supremacy of the Son that are emphasised throughout.

Βραβευέτω. The primary meaning of this word was "to act as umpire," but in Hellenistic Greek it had largely lost this original sense and had come to denote "rule, or administration." Lightfoot insists that there is still an element of *award* or *decision* between two conflicting impulses in the word as it is used in this passage, and that what the Apostle is impressing upon the Colossians here is that it is the peace of Christ that must step in and decide which of two conflicting impulses or motives is to prevail. A recently discovered fragment of Menander shows that this use of βραβεύω, in the sense of "I decide," still survived in comparatively late Greek. It has also this meaning in Wisdom x. 12, ἀγῶνα ἰσχυρὸν ἐβράβευσεν αὐτῷ, "Over his sore conflict he watched as judge."

καὶ εὐχάριστοι γίνεσθε. Cf. Way's translation, "And be ye all thankfulness." St. Paul closes his exhortation here, as he does in so many parallel instances, with a call to thankfulness to God for the grace which had brought the Colossians within the unity of the Christian Church and for the inestimable gift of peace. The adjective εὐχάριστος is not found elsewhere in the

Greek Bible, but it is common enough in Classical Greek, and is frequently found in later Greek papyri and inscriptions, where it denotes the "beneficence" of the gods or of emperors to whom divine honours were offered, as well as the "gratitude" due from the people to their benefactors.

Lists of Virtues and Vices in Profane Literature.

Catalogues of virtues and vices are of frequent occurrence in the Pauline Epistles, as, *e. g.* in Rom. i. 29–31; 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10; Gal. v. 19–21; 1 Tim. i. 9 f., and it is now generally recognised that they are based on similar lists in Jewish or pagan literature. It was customary, however, to look for such catalogues in the writings of philosophers and moralists, but recent discoveries have shown that they are to be found in other quarters of a more popular and democratic character. Specimens of counters used in an ancient game resembling draughts, on one side of which there is a number and on the other a word, generally a noun or an adjective in the vocative case, have come to light. Among the words on the obverse sides of these counters there are frequently found the popular names of virtues and vices, and although they are all written in Latin their derivation in many cases from Hellenistic Greek is quite obvious, and in their Hellenistic forms they would present a very marked similarity to the virtues and vices enumerated by St. Paul. Every vice mentioned in the Pauline catalogue in 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10, with the exception of "covetousness" and "idolatry," neither of which we should look for in a pagan list, is found engraved on these counters. Similar enumerations are also current in some of the comic dramatists, and especially in Plautus.[1]

[1] Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, p. 320 f.

Christian Teaching and Psalmody, iii. 16. 17.

At this point the Apostle turns to the more distinctly religious side of the Christian life in its corporate aspect, as it was manifested in assemblies for worship and social gatherings with a religious colouring, emphasising two factors in particular that are inseparable from the Church as an institution, viz. *teaching* and *psalmody*.

Christian Teaching.

The stress upon the teaching function of the Church follows naturally upon the exposition of the ethical character of the Christian, seeing that it is the foundation upon which that character is built. Right conduct must be based upon an intelligent conception of the fundamental principles revealed in the Gospel of Christ, which is here designated by a phrase, "the word of Christ," found nowhere else in the Epistles, although a parallel phrase, "the word of the Lord," occurs in 1 Thess. i. 8; 2 Thess. iii. 1. The teaching administered by and to the Colossian Church is to be a complete and comprehensive teaching, the application of the many-sided Gospel, with its infinite resources, to every department of human activity. In emphasising the complete equipment of the Christian "with every kind of wisdom" the Apostle has perhaps in view the claim of the heretics to a monopoly of spiritual knowledge. He has already described himself in i. 28 as "admonishing every man and teaching every man in every kind of wisdom," and he employs precisely the same language in impressing upon the Church of Colossæ the type of Christian instruction which it is to administer. The order of the verbs in i. 28 is reversed here, the doctrinal teaching (διδάσκοντες) preceding the hortatory message (νουθετοῦντες).

Christian Psalmody.

Every great spiritual revival in the Christian Church has been accompanied by a corresponding outbreak and development of Christian hymnology, and this phenomenon was a conspicuous feature in the first age of the Church's history, with its vivid enthusiasm and its never-ceasing consciousness of the wonder and delight produced by the marvellous achievements of the Spirit of God. It is this factor in early Christian life that the Apostle has in mind when he speaks of "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (ver. 16). It is probable that he is not referring exclusively to the use of psalmody in assemblies for public worship, because he mentions not only "psalms and hymns" but also "spiritual songs," a term that seems to denote poesy not strictly religious in character, and, therefore, not confined necessarily to strictly religious assemblies. A comparison with the parallel passage in Ephes. v. 18, where there is a clear antithesis between "drunkenness" and "being filled with the Spirit," seems to confirm the view that the Apostle has in mind social as well as religious functions. Christians, too, had their social feasts, which for them took the place of the many public feasts so common in Greek life. The *agape*, which at this period combined in itself the Eucharist and a social meal, was a feast of this description, and even when it was separated from the Eucharist it still retained a semi-eucharistical character, and "spiritual songs" might well have formed a part of the proceedings.

If there is any specific difference between "psalms" and "hymns," the former would denote the Jewish Psalms taken over and used in worship by the Christian Church, whereas the "hymns" would represent the earliest attempts at Christian hymnology, fragments of which are found even in the new Testament, as, *e. g.* in Ephes. v. 14; 1 Tim. iii. 16.

Life in all its Activities a Reasonable Service to Christ, iii. 17.

The picture of the Christian life in its more general aspect is now completed by a comprehensive precept, enjoining the consecration of life and all its activities as a reasonable service to Christ. Work, even though it be the forced labour of the slave, is ennobled by being lifted to the same exalted plane as worship and given a place as an actual component of that worship. What the world to-day sorely needs is St. Paul's idea of the true dignity of work and of the Christian service that consists in honest and conscientious labour. Work, whatever be its character, when inspired by a real Christian motive, is service to the Lord. "Laborare est orare." Work in the mind of St. Paul is not drudgery, not slavery, and not a curse, but the fulfilment of God's purpose for every individual and the placing on the altar of our one most precious offering, there to be made adequate and to be sanctified by the blessing of Christ Himself.

The Christian Family, iii. 18—iv. 1.

From the exposition of the character of the Christian life in its wider aspects the Apostle proceeds to deal with the working out of the fundamental principles of the Gospel in a narrower circle, the Christian household, recognising with a true insight the crowning importance of the home and the family as the seed-plots of the Christian Church. The dominant note of the passage is the essential need of order and discipline in the Church. St. Paul has laboured consistently all through the Epistle to make clear the true and complete freedom of the Christian, and more particularly his freedom from bondage to the spirit-world and the shackles of the Law, and to picture the Christian life as a life of enthusiasm and joy. But he realises that this very

atmosphere of freedom and joy may be productive of some real and definite dangers, and that the inculcation of Christian liberty may conduce to create the impression that well-constituted differences in social and family life have been done away in Christ, so that liberty may develop into licence.

By repeated stress on ὑποτάσσεσθε and ὑπακούετε the Apostle emphatically declares that the Christian life is a life of order, and implies the subjection of one Christian to another. He touches in turn upon the mutual duties and responsibilities of wives and husbands, children and parents, slaves and masters, starting in each case with the duty of obedience and then passing on to the responsibility which rests upon those to whom obedience is due. Underlying every injunction is the Christian's relation to Christ, so that the duty imposed is transformed and becomes a working out in daily life of what being in Christ means. Obedience on the part of those who are in a position of subordination is the obedience due to Christ, and again they who are placed in authority are to find the pattern of their conduct in the love and care of Christ, and are to live as those who are subject to Christ as the Head.

Time will not allow me to discuss the bearing and validity of St. Paul's teaching in this passage in relation to questions and problems which are agitating the world of our own day, such as the emancipation of women, the independence of children, and the claims of the world of labour, and I must content myself with stating that, while I believe that order, discipline, and subordination must ever have their place in the Christian world, it is possible that in matters of detail some of St. Paul's precepts are only applicable to the particular social conditions which obtained in his day, and are, therefore, not necessarily valid for all time. But it is worth noticing that what gives colour to the whole passage is the quality of love: it is the love of Christ that lends force and significance to the Apostle's

precepts. In the parallel passage in Ephes. v. 22–33 it is the figure of the Church as the Bride of Christ that supplies the background to the picture, and doubtless what inspires the Apostle's delineation of the Christian family in this Epistle is the love of Christ for His Bride, the Church, a love that is patient and generous, self-forgetting and self-sacrificing, demanding nothing, grudging nothing, and not even shrinking from death if He may but help and bless. There is no question here of mere subjection and irrational obedience on the one hand, and of a tyrannous adherence to rights on the other. Every Christian relationship has been transfigured by love, so that every social demand is converted into a willing choice.

Slaves and their Masters.

The section dealing with slavery and the mutual responsibilities of master and slave is somewhat longer than those which have in view the relations of husband and wife, of parents and children, because the whole social and industrial fabric of the ancient world was based on the institution of slavery. Christianity, with its proclamation of freedom, attracted slaves in considerable numbers, and the mutual attitude of masters and slaves in the Church became a very real and pressing problem to the Christian leaders of that day. St. Paul consistently emphasised the spiritual freedom of the Christian slave and his spiritual equality in the Church, but he never went so far as to carry out his doctrine to its logical conclusion and to present an unequivocal demand for the emancipation of the slave. The time was not yet ripe for a comprehensive and revolutionary movement of this description, and the Apostle recognised that, although Christian principles worked out to their fullest capacity might demand this social reform, any attempt to uproot what was then the most universal institution could only result in ignominious failure, and

must seriously retard the progress of Christianity in the world. What he set himself to do was to mitigate as far as possible the evils inherent in slavery, and, without demanding the abolition of the institution itself, to create an attitude between master and slave in a Christian household that would materially lighten the burdens and hardships of the latter. He places his finger unerringly upon the crowning evils on both sides; on the side of the slave an entire lack of conscience in his work, a service only adequately rendered when the eye of the master was upon him, and a double-dealing utterly inconsistent with honesty and fidelity to trust; on the side of the master a complete disregard of human rights and an unmerciful exploitation of oppressed humanity for his own selfish purposes. Christianity, according to St. Paul, demands an entirely new and changed standard of conduct from both parties. The slave is encouraged by the thought that even his duties, humble, menial, and repugnant though they may often be, can be filled with a Divine meaning and sanctified by a Christian purpose. Upon the master he enjoins equity and justice, a phrase implying not the treatment of slaves as social equals, but an even-handed, impartial treatment, and the lesson is driven home by the reminder that he too has a Master to whom he must render an account.

iii. 25. *ὁ γὰρ ἀδικῶν κομιεῖται ὃ ἠδίκησε· καὶ οὐκ ἔστι προσωποληψία.* The exact reference in *ὁ ἀδικῶν* is not quite clear, and it is a matter of dispute whether it points to the slave who wrongs his master by indifferent service, or to the master who subjects the slave to harsh and inconsiderate treatment, or whether it points to both. The more general view is that the Apostle is encouraging the slave by the consideration that the master, who illtreats him now and, owing to his superior social position and influence, invariably gets the better of him before the tribunals, will surely meet with his due reward at God's hands; but, in opposition to this

interpretation, we may remark that we hardly expect to find St. Paul putting forward a plea of this description as a motive to the conscientious fulfilment of duty. And, further, the master and his responsibilities have not yet emerged into view in the passage, and the Apostle is still dealing with the slave and his outlook. It is, therefore, preferable on the whole to see in ὁ ἀδικῶν the slave who is remiss in his obligations and utilises his Christian standing as a pretext for his neglect. προσωπολημψία would, then, denote the claim to differential treatment from God on the part of the slave on the score of his religious position, a claim which is unhesitatingly rejected by the Apostle.

The Attitude of the Christian towards his Pagan Environment, iv. 5, 6.

In iv. 5, 6, St. Paul introduces a topic which was of vital importance to a small Christian community surrounded by a dominant paganism, and proceeds to lay down instructions as to the correct attitude of the Christian towards the pagans among whom he had to live his life. The passage is partly a warning against spiritual pride and exclusiveness, against that familiar scorn for the outsider so characteristic of every privileged society, and partly a vigorous assertion of the right even of the pagan to courteous and considerate treatment at the hands of the Christian believer. To this the Apostle adds an injunction concerning the Christian's imperative need of discretion in his relations with the unbeliever, because the eye of the pagan is ever upon him, and the Christian's conduct may become a source of reproach to the body of which he is a member.

iv. 5. τὸν καιρὸν ἐξαγοραζόμενοι. This is translated by Way, "Seize every opportunity, like merchants who buy up a scarce commodity." This may mean either (1) that the Christian is to take advantage of every available opportunity to do good to those that

are without, that by so doing he may give the pagan a favourable impression of the religion that he practises, and thus promote the spread of the Gospel, or (2) the Christian is to learn from the surrounding world everything that is of moral and spiritual value, a thought that is more fully expressed in Phil. iv. 8.

iv. 6. ἅλατι ἠρτυμένος. This is an extension and an explanation of what St. Paul means when he exhorts the Colossians in the following words, "Let your speech be always with grace." We have here a glimpse at a side of the Apostle's character which is not often revealed in the polemical Epistles, but is seen at its best in *Philippians*, where he is not fettered by the shackles of controversy. It is not the conventional Jew, with his contempt for paganism in all its aspects, that is speaking here, but the educated citizen of the Roman world, familiar with the most gracious and polished tone of cultured pagan society.[1] Attic salt is here introduced into the sphere of Christian ethics, but it is not Attic salt in the conventional sense of wit flavouring the conversation, but in the higher sense of the wisdom and knowledge that are to enable the Christian to recognise the right time and the right man, and to use the opportunity to the full. Discretion, courtesy, and wholesomeness of conversation are the three elements that should rule the Christian's intercourse with his pagan environment.

Closing Salutations, iv. 7–18.

Among the names mentioned in the concluding section of the letter to which special interest attaches are those of Mark, Barnabas, and Luke. The cordial tone of the reference to Mark and Barnabas shows that the quarrel of the days long gone by is forgotten and

[1] Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller*, p. 149.

that a sound friendship now prevails among the three companions of the First Missionary Journey, while the expression "Luke, the beloved physician," bears eloquent testimony to the affectionate relationship that existed between the Apostle and his faithful physician and friend.

i. 24. *καὶ ἀνταναπληρῶ τὰ ὑστερήματα τῶν θλίψεων τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐν τῇ σαρκί μου ὑπὲρ τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ, ὅ ἐστιν ἡ ἐκκλησία.* Of the many interpretations of this passage suggested from various quarters the following seems to do most justice to the context itself and to be most consonant with the general scope of the Epistle.

(*a*) *τῶν θλίψεων τοῦ Χριστοῦ.* These are the sufferings which Christ endures, and, as the Apostle has in view the exalted Christ all through the Epistle, the sufferings in question are those which Christ endures now in His exalted state. I am well aware that it is maintained by many scholars that *θλῖψις* is never used in the New Testament of the sufferings of Christ, but this statement is not absolutely correct, because in Rev. i. 9 we find the following expression, *ἐν τῇ θλίψει καὶ βασιλείᾳ καὶ ὑπομονῇ Ἰησοῦ.* The writer of *Revelation* shows signs of having been deeply influenced by the language of *Colossians*, and it is possible that when he speaks of the *θλῖψις Ἰησοῦ* he is thinking of this very passage, which he regarded as pointing to the sufferings of Christ.

(*b*) *τὰ ὑστερήματα.* This term, with its implication that the sufferings of Christ are not yet complete, confirms the suggestion that it is the living and exalted Christ and the afflictions that are His continuous lot that St. Paul has in mind here.

(*c*) *ἀνταναπληρῶ.* The combination of this verb with *ὑστερήματα*, conveying the sense of filling up that which is lacking, can only mean that the sufferings of Christ are not yet complete, and that St. Paul himself is in some sense helping to supply the deficiency. The exact force of *ἀντὶ* in the verb in that case is "instead

of," and it looks forward to ὑπὲρ τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ. The Apostle's own sufferings are part of the Church's suffering, and as he has had more than his share of persecution and suffering he places these to the credit of the suffering Church.

"The root of the whole passage lies in the conception of the inseparable unity between Christ and His Church, so that the suffering of the Church and the suffering of Christ are also one. Christ has not suffered all that He is destined to endure, because He goes on suffering in the sufferings of the Church. St. Paul contributes his share and that a particularly heavy share of the sufferings of the Church, and in so doing contributes towards the completion of the sufferings of Christ. The Church is even in its trials and persecutions what St. Paul describes as 'the fulness of Christ,' that without which Christ Himself is not complete." [1]

ii. 8, 20. τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου. The term στοιχεῖα (*elements*) originally meant the letters of the alphabet, but in Plato and other writers its meaning was extended so as to cover the astral planets, and the physical elements or the four zones of fire, air, water, and earth. In Hellenistic Greek the term received a further extension and came to denote the rudiments of knowledge, and it was generally assumed that St. Paul used it in this sense, and that in the Epistles it stood for an elementary stage of religious knowledge. It had been urged, however, by several Fathers that what the Apostle had in view was the earlier Greek signification, and that τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου referred to the "astral planets," because in Gal. iv. 10 it is closely associated with "days and months and seasons and years," *i. e.* with divisions of time regulated by the movements of the heavenly bodies. But neither of these interpretations is quite adequate, because the phrase as used by St. Paul seems to contain the idea of personality. In In Gal. iv. 3 the bondage "under the elements of the

[1] Armitage Robinson, *Ephesians*, p. 44.

world" is obviously identical with the subjection "under guardians and stewards" of the preceding verse, and again, in Col. ii. 8, "the elements of the world" are contrasted with Christ. In both passages, therefore, the Apostle seems to be thinking of personal beings, a suggestion which receives further support from the close association in Gal. iv. 8, 9 of the two statements, "ye were in bondage to them which by nature are no gods," and "the weak and beggarly elements (*στοιχεῖα*) whereunto ye desire to be in bondage," in the former of which the idea of personality is clearly involved. We might, therefore, suppose that the personalities in view in *τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου* are the astral planets or the angels of the heavenly bodies, but as a matter of fact the reference need not be confined to these. The four elemental principles to which the Greeks gave the name of *στοιχεῖα* were by the end of the pagan period accepted as divine by all heathendom,[1] and in later Jewish theology we find traces of the belief that it was not only the heavenly bodies, and the stars in particular, that had their angels, but that behind all the phenomena of nature there stood the elemental spirits, animating them and guiding their movements. It was this notion then that St. Paul probably had in mind when he spoke of the first age as being in bondage to *τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου*. From the standpoint of the freedom enjoyed by the Christians as the sons of God all differences between Jewish and pagan religion vanished for the moment, the Jew with his law and its angels and the pagan with his astral and elemental spirits both belonged to an inferior cosmic sphere.[2]

ii. 9. *ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ κατοικεῖ πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος σωματικῶς.*

σωματικῶς. This term has been generally interpreted as containing a reference to the body of Christ, either as assumed at the Incarnation or in its

[1] Cumont, *Astrology and Religion among the Greeks*, pp. 121, 122.

[2] Moffatt, *Expositor*, Series viii, Vol. 22, p. 327.

glorified state; but it is objected that in this group of Epistles St. Paul never speaks of the human body of Christ as σῶμα, but always as σάρξ or σῶμα τῆς σαρκὸς, and that the term σωματικῶς must, therefore, be used here in a figurative sense. Haupt takes the meaning of the passage to be that the fulness of the Deity exists in Christ *as a body*, *i. e.* as a complete and organic whole. There is much to be said in favour of this view, because the statement would then be directed against the heretical theory that the πλήρωμα of God was distributed and diluted among the angelic mediators, as one of whom Christ would only have His share. St. Paul would then be insisting that in Christ there dwelt the whole, undivided fulness of the Deity, not fragmentarily, but as an organic whole.

Personally I am inclined to agree with Dr. Armitage Robinson, who in his Commentary on *Ephesians* (p. 88) maintains that what St. Paul has in mind here when he speaks of "the body of Christ" is the *Church*. This interpretation is borne out by the passage which follows, "ye are filled in Him," which seems to be an extension of the thought present in σωματικῶς. Dr. Robinson paraphrases the verse as follows: "For in Christ dwells all the fulness (as I have already said), yea, all the fulness of the Deity, expressing itself through a body: a body, in which you are incorporated, so that in Him the fulness is yours; for He Who is your Head is indeed universal Head of all that stands for rule and authority in the Universe."

ii. 15. ἀπεκδυσάμενος τὰς ἀρχὰς καὶ τὰς ἐξουσίας ἐδειγμάτισεν ἐν παῤῥησίᾳ, θριαμβεύσας αὐτοὺς ἐν αὐτῷ. The difficulty that has been experienced in arriving at a satisfactory rendering of this verse is very substantially diminished if we identify the "principalities and powers" mentioned here with the angels who presided over the Law, a procedure for which ample justification will be found in our second lecture. The general aim of the passage will then be to show that the angel-worship which was the central factor in the Colossian

heresy was both absurd and unnecessary, the trend of the Apostle's argument being somewhat as follows: "These very angels whom you worship and adore were dethroned and their power broken when Christ died on the Cross."

But although the general sense of the passage seems to be tolerably clear there are difficulties connected with the grammar of the passage, the most important of which is perhaps that of deciding the right meaning of ἀπεκδυσάμενος. In iii. 9 the word is used in the Middle sense of "stripping off from oneself," but, if that is the meaning here, we are met not only with an awkward change of metaphor in the next clause, but the question also arises how the "principalities and powers" can be described as clothing which belongs to and is put off by Christ or God. The word is not found anywhere except in this Epistle, but the simpler forms ἀποδύειν and ἐκδύειν are found in secular writers in the sense of "stripping a man of his arms" (*spoliare*, Lat.), and if we regard the double compound as emphasising the completeness of the action we can then translate the passage, "completely disarming the principalities and powers," with either Θεὸς or Χριστὸς as subject. We then avoid the change of metaphor necessitated by giving the word its Middle force, and are provided with a rendering in which the progressive stages in the victory of Christ over the spirit-world are described, viz. the disarming, the holding up to contempt, and the final triumph.

ii. 18. καταβραβενέτω. In both the Authorised and Revised Versions καταβραβενέτω is given the sense of "beguile" or "rob." βραβεύω originally meant "I act as umpire or judge," and παρβαραβεύω was used in the sense of "I award the prize unfairly," and in both our English Versions this sense of παραβραβεύω has been wrongly attached to καταβραβεύω. This latter word is very rare, but it is used in Greek writers and in papyri of "giving a decision against," and this meaning makes excellent sense in this passage. Moulton

and Milligan (*Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament*, s.v.) suggest that a flavour of "assumption" and "officialdom" which is associated with the term may have led St. Paul to give it the preference over κατακρίνω in this context.

θέλων ἐν ταπεινοφροσύνῃ. There are three possible explanations of this expression.

1. Place a comma after θέλων, connecting it with καταβραβευέτω, and translate, "Let no one condemn you of set purpose by humility."

2. Take the three words as one continuous expression and assume that St. Paul is employing a Hebraism here, and that what he intends to convey is "taking pleasure in humility." The objection to this is that the Apostle rarely if ever used Hebraisms, and never a Hebraism which is such an offence to good Greek grammar as this would be.

3. Still taking the words as one expression, translate "wishing to do so in humility."

Hort felt that each and every interpretation suggested was so unsatisfactory that he insisted that the text of the passage must be corrupt, and proposed the following emendation, ἐν ἐθελοταπεινοφροσύνῃ, on the analogy of ἐθελοθρησκεία in ii. 23. We should then translate "by a gratuitous humility."

ἃ ἑώρακεν ἐμβατεύων. It was frequently thought that the text of this passage must have been corrupted because, until quite recently, the attempts to find a meaning in it as it stands were in no case very satisfactory. The discovery of an inscription at Klaros in which the word ἐνεβάτευσεν occurs has now, however, made the meaning of the passage quite clear. This inscription describes the course of the mystic who has been initiated, and then ἐνεβάτευσεν, *i. e.* "sets foot on" and performs the entire series of rites. ἐμβατεύω is, therefore, a technical term connected with the Mystery Religions, indicating the final act in the mystic ceremonial, the setting foot on the threshold of the inner shrine, after the first initiation, and the admission

to the new life which he is now to share with the god. As used by St. Paul it is a quoted word containing a sarcastic reference to the heretic with his false worship, his fleshly mind, and his trust in the visions which were supposed to endow him with divine wisdom. The whole passage may be translated as follows: "Taking his stand on what he has seen (in the Mysteries), vainly puffed by his unspiritual mind, and not keeping hold of the Head."

ii. 23. *ἐθελοθρησκεία.* This word is only found in this passage, and is apparently coined by St. Paul. A compound built on the same lines, *ἐθελοδουλεία*, occurs in classical writers (Plato, *Symp*: 184, C.), and if we accept Hort's emendation of the text of ii. 18, quoted above, we have a similar example of a Pauline coinage in *ἐθελοταπεινοφροσύνη.* What the word probably denotes here is the worship of angels, which is contemptuously characterised as gratuitous and uncalled for.

ii. 23. *οὐκ ἐν τιμῇ τινὶ πρὸς πλησμονὴν τῆς σαρκός.* It is hardly too much to say that every attempt to provide a satisfactory rendering of this passage has resulted in comparative failure. The interpretations put forward from various quarters fail in one or other of two directions. Those which do justice to the Greek text do not convey anything like good sense, while those which seem to represent the general sense of the Apostle's thought at this point do this at the expense of the Greek of the passage. The most familiar instance of the latter type is the rendering of Lightfoot and of the Revised Version, which reads "but are not of any value against the indulgence of the flesh," but it offends seriously in several points against correct Greek. *πρὸς* is never used in the sense of "against," and always means "with a view to," and "not of any value" cannot be fairly got out of *οὐκ ἐν τιμῇ τινί.* The only word in the passage which is accurately translated is *πλησμονή*, which invariably denotes excessive indulgence.

A rendering of a different type is that of the Greek

Fathers and of many modern authorities, who translate "do no honour to the body as satisfying the reasonable wants of the flesh," where *πρὸς* and *οὐκ ἐν τιμῇ τινὶ* are fairly accurately represented, but an entirely wrong meaning is attached to *πλησμονή*, which is nowhere used in a good sense. And, even if the translation were correct, it is difficult to see what force it has as a part of the Apostle's argument.

A third effort connects *οὐκ ἐν τιμῇ τινὶ* not with *πρὸς πλησμονὴν τῆς σαρκός*, but with the preceding clause, which gives us the following translation, "which things having indeed a reputation of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and severity to the body, not in any honour (to the body) are for the indulgence of the flesh"; but this again, while making tolerably good sense, is only arrived at by supplying words which are not present in the Greek text, and is from this point of view unsatisfactory. In view of the apparent failure of all these attempts to combine a reasonable meaning with justice to the Greek text, it is possible that we may have to agree with Hort and Haupt that the original text was corrupted very early in the history of the Epistle, and that no really adequate interpretation is, therefore, to be expected.

iv. 16. *τὴν ἐκ Λαοδικείας ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀναγνῶτε.* The question of the identity of the letter from Laodicea which the Colossians are enjoined to read by the Apostle has been the source of many surmises. We shall clear the ground very substantially if we insist on what the context implies very plainly, viz. that the letter must have stood in the same relation to the Church of Laodicea as our Epistle did to the Church of Colossæ, and must, therefore, have been a letter written to the Laodiceans by St. Paul. The issue is in that case, therefore, narrowed down to a choice between a Pauline letter, which was lost at a very early date and has left no trace of its existence, and one of our extant Pauline Epistles.

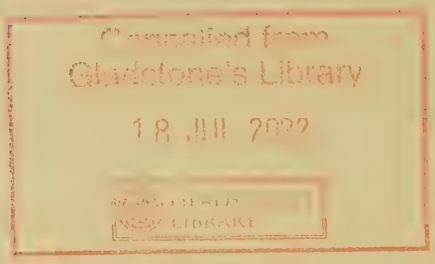
Some scholars have identified it with 1 *Timothy*,

because in several MSS. the words ἐγράφη ἀπὸ Λαοδικείας are found at the close of that Epistle, but these are a later insertion and do not form a part of the original text, and no weight can be attached to them as evidence of the Epistle's provenance. And, further, St. Paul's own language in Colossians proves almost unquestionably that he was never at Laodicea.

The most convincing theory is that which sees in our *Ephesians* the letter in question, if, as we have strong reasons for believing, this is an authentic Pauline letter. *Ephesians* was, as we have seen, a circular letter, and it is not improbable that in one of the copies despatched by the Apostle the words εν Λαοδικεια were inserted where εν Εφεσω are found in our canonical *Ephesians*. The identification with *Ephesians* is further confirmed by Marcion's description of that letter as addressed "to the Laodiceans." If we agree, therefore, that *Ephesians* was written from Rome by St. Paul somewhere about the time that he wrote *Colossians*, there is little difficulty associated with the theory that "the letter from Laodicea" which the Colossians were instructed to read was only *The Epistle to the Ephesians* under another name.

There exists at the present time an Epistle which describes itself as "St. Paul's Epistle to the Laodiceans" and has had a curious history, but it is clearly a forgery, dating perhaps from the second century, but more probably from the fourth, and is only an attempt to fill up the gap created by the non-appearance of any Pauline letter answering to the description in our Epistle. It is extant only in a Latin translation, the text of which can be studied in Lightfoot's *Colossians*, or in the Introduction to Nestle's Greek Testament. It was read in some circles of the early Church (cf. Jerome, *De Vir. Illustr.* V.), and was widely circulated in the mediæval period. Copies of it are found in MSS. of the Pauline Epistles which originated between the sixth and fifteenth centuries, and there is nothing in these MSS. to indicate that it was in any way differentiated

from the other Epistles of St. Paul. In England in the twelfth century it seems to have been generally regarded as a genuine Pauline composition, and it was included in several of the Early English Bibles of the fifteenth century. It was not until the revival of learning had led to sounder methods of criticism that its claims were finally extinguished. It is, as a matter of fact, merely a mosaic of Pauline phrases, culled from various Epistles and strung together without any definite plan or purpose. The materials were borrowed chiefly from *Philippians*, with only an occasional reminiscence of other Epistles, and the letter closes with an injunction, which is an obvious imitation of Col. iv. 18, that it should be read by the Colossians and that *The Epistle to the Colossians* should in its turn be read in Laodicea.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